

DISCOURSES
FOR THE
USE OF FAMILIES,
ON THE
ADVANTAGES OF A FREE ENQUIRY,
AND ON THE
STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

By W. HAZLITT, M.A. 

— *Parvis quoque rebus magna juvari.* HOR^E

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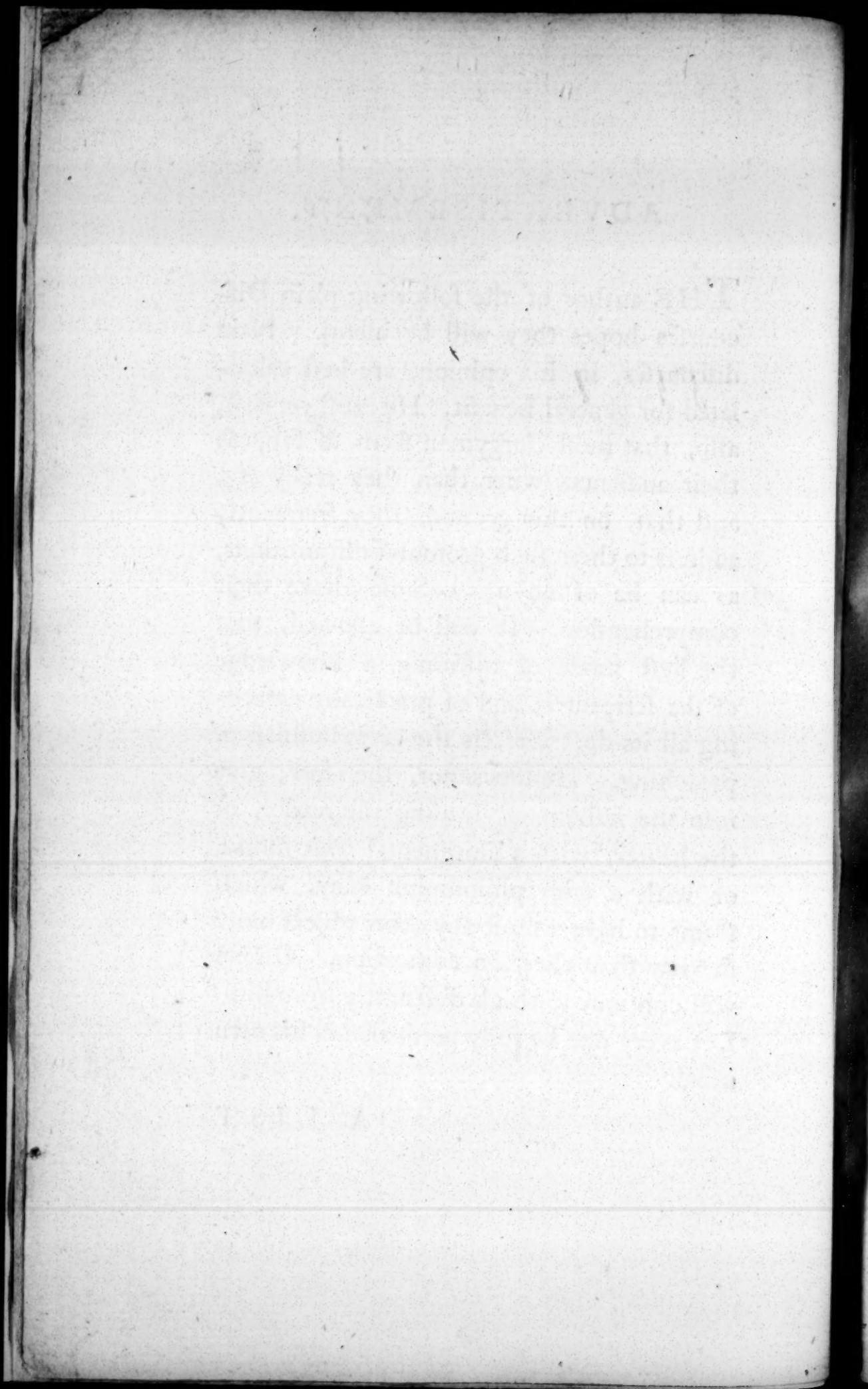


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THE author of the following plain Discourses hopes they will be useful. Plain discourses, in his opinion, are best calculated for general benefit. He must remark, also, that most clergymen seem to suppose their audiences wiser than they really are, and that, on this ground, they frequently address to them such profound disquisitions, as can be of no use because above their comprehension. It will be allowed, that the best mode of diffusing a knowledge of the scriptures, and of practically enforcing all its doctrines, is the great business of preaching. He does not, therefore, give into the fashion of amusing the reader, or the hearer, with a sentimental *ignis fatuus*, or with a trim philosophic essay, which seems to have almost any other object more in view than christian edification. Others will continue to think differently from him. Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind.

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D I S-

DISCOURSES, &c.

DISCOURSE I.

OUR OBLIGATIONS TO ENQUIRE INTO OUR DUTY, OR
TO APPLY OURSELVES TO THE DISCOVERY OF OUR
TRUE WAY TO HAPPINESS.

The first part on this text.

JEREMIAH vi. 16.

*Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways,
and see, and ask for the old paths, where
is the good way, and walk therein, and ye
shall find rest for your souls.*

AN indolent habit, and a precipitate
conduct, are equally prejudicial to
our best interests.

The mind, as well as the body, was, it
is obvious, originally intended for labour.

But, that we might not labour in vain,
it has pleased God, in his goodness, to

B

give

2 DISCOURSE I.

give us reason to examine, and an understanding to know, *the things that are true.*

And, as he is the absolutely perfect being, who does nothing in vain, it must, therefore, be his sovereign will, that we exert, and improve those great talents which he has committed to our trust. Certainly, therefore, it must be our highest honour and happiness to comply with the divine appointment.

We accordingly find, that misery is the inevitable consequence of vice, and that vice always shelters itself, under an inconsiderate and thoughtless habit, or under a blind and stubborn attachment to systems of opinions, which were either framed by ourselves at random, or handed down to us by others, without any enquiry.

In short, as activity is the health and strength of the body, and the source of its greatest perfection, enquiry, in like manner, is the enlightener, the improver, and the bracer of the mind. Without enquiry, the mind must always continue in a weak and languid state, whatever accidental

DISCOURSE I. 3

cidental advantages it may now and then have had to relieve it; whereas, a serious and impartial enquiry, through whatever perplexing mazes it may lead us, will at last terminate in precious truth.

True religion, therefore, the religion of reason, and the religion which has God for its author, calls us to the *light*, that our deeds may be made manifest what they are, and that, from repeated circumspection and information, we may daily more and more grow up into the divine likeness.

On the contrary, every false religion is *afraid of the light*, demands our passive acquiescence in all its contradictory doctrines, wrappeth itself up in impenetrable clouds of mystery, *neither cometh to the light*, lest its sandy foundation should be detected, and exposed.

Every sinner, in like manner, lurketh about in secret places, and *loveth darkness rather than light, because his deeds are evil*. He shunneth reflection, because his conscience will not bear the inspection of such a judge; and, as he sinketh in ignorance,

rance, he proportionably sinketh into the dregs of iniquity.

Hence all the wickedness and misery of the Jewish nation, as we may learn from all their prophets, and their whole history from beginning to end. *My people will not consider.* Thus said the Lord, in his repeated admonitions to that abandoned race. They hated instruction, and cast reproof behind them. They said, *peace, peace,* when there was *no* peace; and they committed abomination without shame. From the least of them even to the greatest, some few characters always excepted, every one was given to covetousness; from the prophet even to the priest every one dealt falsely.

Therefore, the judgments of God, which were long retarded, through his forbearance and long suffering, stood in array against them.

Yet, the adorably benignant sovereign, was not willing that they should perish, but that they should turn to him, and be saved. To this purpose, then, as an effectual

effectual remedy against all the evils that threatened them, he graciously directed them in the words of the text, to exert those faculties which he had given them for attaining true happiness, and not, to their own shame and confusion of face, despise the riches of his goodness, which would lead them to repentance. *Thus,* said the Lord, *stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.* As if he had said, “*Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is; for I have given you a lamp to your feet, which ye need only to observe, and follow, and all will be well.*”

The first thing, which I shall consider, in the words of the text, is the infinite compassion and loving kindness of God, even to sinners, to notorious and abandoned sinners. Hence, we may, secondly, be gratefully disposed to give the greatest attention to those means of salvation which

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he has graciously proposed, to reinstate us in his favour.

The first thing observable in the words of the text is the infinite compassion and loving kindness of God, even to sinners, to notorious, and abandoned sinners.

Though ignorance has frequently represented this all glorious Being, an implacable severe and inexorable judge, inexorable to the least offending suppliant, reason and revelation universally declare, that he is not the enemy of any creature he has made, but *rich in mercy unto all*.

The Jews, are a most illustrious manifestation of this truth, who, from their first origin, were a stubborn, and gainsaying people.

Immediately after their redemption from Egyptian bondage, they murmured against that good providence, which wrought out their salvation for them, and turned aside from the commandments of their God.

Again, soon after they were settled in the promised land, they stupidly, and ungratefully, suffered themselves to be drawn into

DISCOURSE I. 7

into all the vices of the neighbouring nations, into those very vices for which the Canaanites were driyen out before them.

In succeeding ages, in return for repeated mercies, they too generally became the more unthankful and unholy. And, at last, “ the whole head was sick, the whole heart was faint ; from the sole of the foot even to the head, there was no soundness in them, but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores.”

Yet, in these most deplorable circumstances, God was not willing that they should perish, but that they should turn unto him, and *find rest for their souls.* *Thou,* said this gracious Being to that people, *hast played the harlot with many lovers ; thou hast forsaken me, and hast burnt incense unto other Gods, and worshipped the works of thy own hands ;—but, notwithstanding these things, return again unto me faith the Lord.*

Affuredly, then, this is not the language of an inexorable sovereign, or of a reprobating God. This is plainly the lan-

guage of THE FATHER OF ALL MERCIES.
If we stand in the ways and see, there is not any God like unto our God, as he clearly, and condescendingly represents himself. As great as his power is, so great is his love. All his works proclaim him God our Saviour. And, he calleth us, by all his dispensations, by all his prophets, and by his own son; to flee from the wrath to come.

We should not, therefore, indeed we cannot, without giving ourselves up to be led blindfold and stifling the natural reflections of our own minds, *forsake him the fountain of living waters, and hew us out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.* We should, and we will, if we sufficiently rouse up our intellectual faculties, *wash, and be clean, seek the Lord whilst he may be found,* and instantly resolve to lay hold upon the crown of eternal life.

But, what we should do, what it must be at all times of infinite importance to us to do, that it must be the most stupendous folly and madness in us ever to neglect doing.

Every

DISCOURSE I. 9

Every impenitent sinner ought to be struck with horror at his own deformity, and be ashamed to shew his head. He is a monster in the creation. He is a traitor to his best friend. He rebels against the Lord of Heaven and Earth. He defaceth the image of God within him. All his ways are darkness; and his steps take hold on hell. What an odious and despicable character does he, therefore, exhibit to the world! How full of infamy and wretchedness is every part of this character! And, how earnestly, and constantly, therefore, should we avoid it, and abhor it!

To this purpose then, let us seriously attend, in the second place, to those directions that were given to the Jews in the text, and which we may easily apply to our own particular circumstances. "Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, which is the good way, and walk therein."

Now, the first information which we gain from these words, is, that God has furnished us with sufficient powers to acquire

acquire the knowledge of our duty. Here, again, it is implied, in the second place, that this is plain and easy to us, and, in the third place, that we should exercise ourselves in the discovery of it. We learn, in the next place, what is the best method of acquiring the knowledge of our duty; and we are taught, in the last place, that *obedience* as well as *knowledge* is expected from us.

In those directions, which are given us in the text, how to escape the wrath to come, and to approve ourselves the objects of infinite mercy, it is in the first place, demonstrably implied, that “God “ has given us sufficient powers to acquire “ the knowledge of our duty.”

Our lot, indeed, must have been peculiarly hard, if our duty were beyond our reach, and if, notwithstanding, we were liable to punishment for remaining ignorant of it. But this is evidently not the case; because, *Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way.* We can, therefore,

DISCOURSE I. 11

stand in the ways, and see, and, also, find out the good way, unless it be our own fault.

It would be infinitely debasing the character of the supreme and matchless Jehovah, it would be insulting him with the most blasphemous language, to suppose him capable of mocking such feeble creatures as we are ; whom, if power were the only measure of his government, he could instantly destroy with the breath of his mouth. As he has commanded, therefore, we must have the power to obey, we must be able to *seek and find* him, to discover his will, and yield a sincere obedience to it.

But, his command is clear, and positive. He does not say, *you can do nothing, being as destitute of power as the ground you tread upon.* Nor does he say, *wait you the Lord's time,* because every time is the Lord's time, if we be willing to improve it. He no where teaches us to consider ourselves as the passive instruments of fate, incapable of a good word, or thought, or action,

action, unless we be first irresistably wrought upon by some miraculous interposition; but, on the contrary, universally addresseth us as beings, who, by the endowments of his wisdom and goodness, can ourselves examine, discover, and embrace the things that belong to our peace. *Stand, saith the Lord, and see.* We, therefore, as I have already observed, can stand and see. Otherwise, indeed, we could not be accountable for any part of our conduct; nor could there be any distinction of character, between those, who are reputed the best, and those who are reputed the very worst of mankind.

But, here, it is farther obvious, that as we are constituted moral and accountable creatures, it must be of the utmost importance to us, to be persuaded that we are such. For, we may be as well without the power of doing good, as from the notion that we have not this power, neglect the exertion of it. We should not, therefore, give way to a benumbing torpor of mind, nor be tempted to imagine, whilst God has spoken to us, that he has spoken to us to

no manner of purpose, but should humbly hearken to his voice, which is universally confirmed by the testimony of our own breasts; and whilst we gratefully acknowledge his gifts, we should be anxious to improve them to those benevolent purposes, for which they were bestowed, that, thus, we may finally *have praise of him, and rejoice in ourselves for evermore.*

But, we may learn, in the second place, from the words of the text, that the knowledge of our duty is, in general, so far from being mysterious, or unintelligible to us, that, with a little attention, it must be universally plain and easy.

We are not supposed, by the prophet, to be left in the dark, but considered in the light of travellers, who have some particular, distant, habitation in view, and who, capable of ascertaining at what point this lieth, have only to *observe* amidst a variety of ways that lead to different habitations, and *see* which is the *right* way. And as those who are travelling eastward, have only to keep the eastern point in view, and then

to

to observe amidst ten thousand different ways, which guides them in a right line to their wished-for habitation, and to follow this; we, in like manner, have only to *enquire* and *know*, to *seek* and *find*, to *open our eyes* and *see* what our duty is. As Moses said to the children of Israel, “ This commandment, which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off,—but the word is very nigh unto thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.” He would have expressed the same thing, if he had said, ‘ It is so far from being beyond the reach of man, that it is all within himself, unless he be an idle, and unprofitable servant.’

And, according to his declaration, our own experience will convince us, that we have only to commune a moment with our own hearts, upon the different pursuits of men, and we shall soon discover which is the *good way*.

As pleasure, and riches, and honours are transient, and unsatisfying goods, our reason will,

will, therefore, instantly teach us, that neither of these can be the good way. The *good way* must give us joy upon reflection; and, as we advance in it, give us still nearer and more enlarged views of complete happiness.

If we consider, then, a little farther, we shall find that the love of God and man only can administer peace, continually increasing peace to the soul. Whatever way, therefore, amongst numberless different ways, most effectually promoteth and establisheth this love, must be the best of those ways.

In other words, every man's own conscience will readily inform him, that to *do justly*, to *love mercy*, and to *walk humbly with our God*, must be the sure road to happiness; and, what justice and mercy mean, and what it is to render all due homage and praise to God, the sense of right and wrong, which is implanted in every man, will, in almost all cases, help us to discover. The prophet, therefore, says, *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good.* And, the apostle

Paul

Paul proposes the question, “ Know ye
“ not of your own selves, what is right?”
Again, he very consistently teaches, that
*those, who have not the law, are a law unto
themselves.* And, though those, who have
not the law, could not, of themselves, find
out the law; yet, it is no sooner proposed
to them, all its precepts being so plain and
forcible, and so exactly correspondent to the
natural sentiments of the human mind, than
they must pronounce it to be holy, just,
and good.

The law of the gospel in particular, is so
pure and heavenly, that we must almost
instantaneously acknowledge its divine au-
thority; and is, at the same time, so ob-
vious, that *he that runs may read it.* To
submit ourselves entirely to the *divine will,*
and to *do to all others as we would be treated*
ourselves, is that very perfection for which
we would naturally wish. But, this con-
spicuously manifesteth itself in every page
of the gospel, to be the sum of what God
requires of us, as the candidates for his
everlasting blessedness.

The

The prophet, therefore, calls the gospel *an high way*; and adds, that *the way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein*. Our Lord, in like manner says, *My yoke is easy, and my burthen is light*: and, the apostle John, *His commandments are not grievous*.

But, it is not *argument*, so much as *experience*, that impresses an irresistible conviction of those truths upon the mind.

Argument, indeed, may fully satisfy us, that *the way of the wicked is as darkness*, and that this way is clearly delineated, with all its concomitant horrors, in the gospel; and again, that *wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace*; and that these ways are *written, as with a diamond*, in the same gospel. But, it is *experience* which makes every thing easy and endearing to us. When we can once be persuaded to *search the scriptures* as we ought, every difficulty concerning those terms of acceptance which they prescribe, will gradually vanish; and, the more we accustom ourselves to this divine study, the more shall we know, from the harmonious

C testimony

testimony of the spirit, and of our own spirits, that the doctrines are of God.

As, then, we are furnished with sufficient powers to acquire the knowledge of our duty, and as this is so plain and easy to us, it hence demonstrably follows, in the third place, and as we are expressly taught in the words of the text, that we should seriously exercise ourselves in the discovery of it.

“ Thus saith the Lord, stand in the ways,
“ and see, and ask—where is the good
“ way.”

It would be supposing that the Great God has in vain constituted us what we are, that is, capable of enquiry, if we were to think, at the same time, that he does not require, nor expect us to make any enquiry. It would, likewise, be offering the greatest mockery to God, to expect from him any further directions, or supernatural aids for finding out the good way, before we had first carried into practice those directions, which he has already abundantly given us.

If we would, therefore, give any honour to God, or do any justice to ourselves, we must

must arouse all the powers within us, and apply these to all those lessons of wisdom, which both nature and revelation clearly inculcate: or, we must give all diligence to know what we must *do* to be saved.

As Christians, this duty is peculiarly incumbent upon us. We cannot, otherwise, indeed, with any degree of consistency, assume the Christian name. For our Lord expressly teaches that, if *we would enter into life*, we must *seek, and search, and ask, and watch, and pray*; and the apostle directs us to *prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good.*

Enquiry, therefore, is as necessary as it is important; and should, therefore, be always accounted of supreme importance.

However the affairs of the world may attract our attention, or whatever numberless cares may continually press around us, the prevailing language of our hearts ought to be, at all times, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the Most High?* Or, *what shall we do to inherit eternal life?* How shall we try, search, and

C 2 examine?

examine? Whence shall we receive the greatest light and assistance? By what measures shall we most effectually obtain the jewel of great price? What vices are to be discarded? What practices are to be altered and amended? and, what affections are to be cultivated and improved?

After we have made the greatest progress in this divine science, we should be still putting the question, with the young man in the gospel, and with more humble and serious dispositions, *What lack I yet?* What is farther to be done? What passions to be corrected? What new duties to be considered and pursued? And how shall we go on advancing to greater perfection?

Thus only, indeed, can we walk worthy the high vocation with which we are called.

The contrary conduct unmans and unchristianizes us; divests us of our rationality; and degrades us not only to a level with inferior animals, but even to a level with the clods of the valley: and, as it discovers such ingratitude to our Maker,

and

and so daring a contempt of his authority, must, therefore, necessarily debar us of his favour. Yea, we must finally, in the severest terms, condemn and reproach ourselves, as inexcusably guilty, and unworthy of everlasting life, for having neglected the *one thing needful*; for having neglected *this only*, whilst we were anxiously inquisitive about every thing that respected our interests in this world.

We cannot, indeed, at present, offer any plea in justification of our conduct, for bestowing more care upon the body than upon the mind; nor for making that an excuse for omitting spiritual duties, which we would by no means allow as an excuse for omitting any temporal concerns. If, for instance, when there is any competition between our duty and our present emoluments, we give the preference to this world, it is plain that the love of this world, and not the love of God, is the prevailing principle by which we are actuated. If, again, the influence of company, can prevail upon us to absent ourselves from public worship,

when our hearts inform us, that this is an important duty, it is plain that we regard the pleasure of our company more than the favour of God: and if we will not, in any case, indeed in every case, take those pains to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which we always readily take, for filthy lucre's sake, it is plain, much too plain, that the commands of God, and his final approbation, are amongst the last of our concerns.

In short, if we suffer the great salvation, which is proposed to us in the gospel, to give way to any other object whatever; if this salvation be not always, or at least generally, supreme in our affections, we must confess ourselves unworthy of it, and, therefore, cannot reasonably hope that we shall at last be rewarded with it.

We should, therefore, examine ourselves, and see, that we prize *wisdom* as much as *profit*; and that we labour as *much*, or indeed *more*, for that bread which endureth to everlasting life, than we do for that bread, which only passeth into the belly, and

and then perisheth. Or, as we are authorized, enabled, and commanded so to do, as the apostle exhorteth, let us not be *unwise*, but *understanding what the will of the Lord is.*

But, having thus shewn you, that, since God has graciously furnished us with powers for attaining the knowledge of our duty, and since he has moreover made this plain and easy to us, we should, therefore, exercise ourselves in the discovery of it; I should now proceed to point out what seems to be the best method of accomplishing our purpose, and likewise to shew, that *obedience*, as well as *knowledge*, is expected from us. These considerations, however, with the conclusion of the whole, must be reserved for our next meditations.

In the mean time, let us seriously consider what we are, of what we are capable, what duties are required from us, and how fully and clearly these are made known to us; and let us, therefore, give glory to God, by vigorously exerting those faculties which he has given us, by making our

eternal interests the grand object of our pursuits, and by working out our own salvation, *with fear and trembling*, with the utmost caution and circumspection, and with the utmost horror and aversion, of the least allowed transgression of the *least* of the divine commandments.

D I S-

DISCOURSE II.

SHEWING THAT THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR DUTY IS
THE WAY TO LIFE; AND WHAT IS THE BEST
METHOD OF ACQUIRING THIS KNOWLEDGE.

The second part on this text.

JEREMIAH vi. 16.

*Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways,
and see, and ask for the old paths, where
is the good way, and walk therein, and ye
shall find rest for your souls.*

THESE words I have already observed,
are a positive manifestation of the in-
finite compassion and loving-kindness of
God, even to *sinners*, to *notorious* and *aban-*
doned sinners. He is not willing that any
should perish. After we have *forsaken him*,
the fountain of living waters, and *bewed us*
out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no
water,

water, he, even then, proposeth rest for our souls.

Hence, then, we see, that this all-glorious Being is not, as he has been sometimes blasphemously represented, the enemy of any creature he has made, but *rich in mercy unto all*, from everlasting; as adorable in his forbearance and long-suffering, as for the astonishing displays of his uncontrollable power. “Thus saith the Lord,” even to those who had rejected his dominion over them, “Stand ye in the ways, “and see, and ask for the old paths, where “is the good way, and walk therein, and “ye shall find rest for your souls.”

It is his pleasure, therefore, to restore and perfect us, unless it be our own fault.

To this purpose, the language of our text holds out this first object to us, that he has furnished us with sufficient powers to acquire the knowledge of our duty. For, as he is incapable of mocking the creatures of his power, it is therefore evident, since he has commanded us to *stand, and see, and enquire,*

enquire, where our true happiness lies, that we can be obedient to the heavenly voice.

But, in the second place, we are likewise informed, that the knowledge of our duty is plain and easy to us. We have only to *stand*, and we shall *see*; to *seek* and we shall *find*; to *knock* and it shall be *opened* to us. It is not hidden from us, neither is it far off, but within the reach of every man who is solicitous to obtain it.

Hence, it is obvious, in the third place, that we should seriously exercise ourselves in discovering the knowledge of our duty. This is our most important study: and, since the authority of the Supreme Being concurs, with our own assured and dearest interests, to make us work out our own salvation, we must be inexcusable, if we neglect it; we must, indeed, be absolutely inexcusable, if the great *salvation* proposed to us, have not at all times the sovereign hold of our affections.

But having already, I hope, sufficiently considered the preceding particulars, I shall now proceed to enquire, in the fourth place,

place, what is the best method of attaining the most clear and satisfactory knowledge of our duty.

Enquiry, I know, is represented by some to be the most dangerous way of proceeding that we can take; for, we are *weak*, they say, and *fallible* creatures, and the majority of mankind have so much of their time unavoidably devoted to the affairs of this life, that they cannot sufficiently examine, or discern truth; and that their only means, therefore, of keeping clear of error, is to trust to the decisions of the learned, and submit their opinions to their superior wisdom.

But, notwithstanding all the artificial arguments that have been offered to this purpose, the only danger arising from a free and impartial enquiry, is the danger of departing from irrational, antiquated, systems, which have no solid foundation, but are built upon *hay*, *straw*, *stubble*, and such corruptible materials, which will, therefore, tumble down, as soon as they are impartially examined.

Learning.

Learning, it is granted, is of unspeakable advantage to the sincere, and unbiased lovers of truth.

But there are men of great learning, who, through their early imbibed prejudices, and the subsequent, soporiferous, golden charms, of their particular situations, have been tempted to apply all their learning in the defence of self-evident contradictions.

Of what use is all that learning of a Horsley, and a Hurd, which they have employed in support of a Trinity; and which may with propriety be termed sophistical quibbling?

As an expert arithmetician may puzzle us upon a variety of questions, without being able to convince us that two and two are not equal to four; they may confound, and overwhelm us with metaphysical subtleties, but can never persuade us, unless we previously become apostates to common sense, that one indivisible essence is composed of three distinct persons.

Besides,

Besides, if after the most extensive enquiry, we should still be found to embrace some erroneous sentiments, we can certainly do no honour to God, by counteracting the clear decisions of our own minds, but must, on the contrary, by this conduct, incur his displeasure. For he requires us to serve him according to *our own* understandings, and not according to the understanding of any *other man*, or of any body of men.

As we have seen, therefore, that God has commanded us to enquire, unquestionable experience will soon convince us, that an honest, unbiased enquiry will lead us still farther and farther into all truth.

Besides, we have already seen that the knowledge of our duty, is not beyond the reach of any man, but is plain and easy to every man, who only desires to understand it, and resolves to examine into it. The spread of error is never to be ascribed to the *incapacity*, but, on the contrary, to the *indolence* of man; or to his wayward lusts and passions, which make him wilfully blind

blind or obstinately incorrigible. Let these obstacles be but once removed, and then we shall have only to *ask*, as we are directed in the text, which of the *old paths* is the *good way*, and it will immediately offer itself to our view.

To this purpose, then, we must, in the first place, especially endeavour to lay aside all prejudice ; and not determine that *this*, or *that* is the good way, but *ask* or examine, which, amongst the very different ways that are presented to us, is the *best* way.

It is farther to be observed, that, by being directed to ask for the *good* way, it is not intended that we should ask for that way which is crowded with the greatest numbers ; or for that way in which our fathers have walked ; or for that way which is most frequented by those who are accounted the *great* and the *wise* ; but for *that* way which most effectually promoteth goodness amongst men, which will afford them the greatest peace and security whilst they are in it, and which, in the end, will

assuredly lead them in a strait line to happiness.

But it is, farther, evidently implied in our being directed to ask, or enquire at all, that we are expected to make use of our *own reason*, and not yield an implicit faith to any doctrines, however universal, because *others* may believe these doctrines to be true, or the magistrate may have set his *seal of orthodoxy* upon them. We are not taught, as was already observed, to ask which is the most *common*, but which is the *good* way; nor are we taught to ask for *others*, nor to lead, or be led by others, but to ask for *ourselves*. And, indeed, it is indisputable, that we must ask for ourselves, to ask to any purpose, and that we must believe, what, after the most serious examination, appears to *ourselves* to be right, and not what appears to *others* to be so. Otherwise, we should have been directed, instead of exerting our own faculties, only to ask of the *pope*, or of our *priests*, or of our *governors*; and to do just as they command us.

It

It is plainly ridiculous, therefore, and contrary to the divine admonition in the text, to profess any doctrines, or any religion, merely because these have been the doctrines or the religion of our *ancestors*, or the doctrines or religion of the *state*, or *our own* doctrines or religion in time past.

As rational beings we can in reality profess nothing, but what has approved itself to our impartial enquiry: and, whatever too, after successive enquiries, shall appear to us to be wrong, we are, as rational beings, bound to forsake and oppose, however long we may have been accustomed to it, by whatever numbers it may still be countenanced, and by whatever authority it may continue to be supported.

But, it is farther to be observed, that, when we are taught to ask for the *old paths*, it is not by this intended to be signified, that whatever, comparing things with things, has the greatest antiquity on its side, is, for this reason, the *best*. For idolatry is older than the Mosaic religion;

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and this, again, is older than Christianity. Popery, likewise, is older than the reformation: though the most excellent way of all is much older than popery. In short, if the claim to antiquity were to direct us in our choice of systems, besides renouncing the exercise of our mental faculties, we must run the hazard of falling into numberless monstrous corruptions. It is, also, to be considered, that we might dispute for ever, which of so many systems that could be mentioned was the most ancient.

To prevent our being bewildered, then, in this matter, we are directed to ask for the *good* way as well as for the *old* way: which is to the same purpose, as if we had been directed to ask, which amongst the *old* ways is the *best* way, or which seems to be most fully approved, and recommended to us, by the Fountain of all wisdom and knowledge.

Now our only successful method of discovering this, is to judge of all the different religions that are proposed to us, according

cording to that reason and conscience which God has graciously given us. These are the primary lights of heaven to mortals in their journey through life. And, if we only examine all the different religions in the world by the assistance of these pure and infallible guides, we shall easily discern which is the most perfect, or which is most fully calculated, for promoting the reasonable, spiritual, worship of the infinitely wise and righteous, moral Governour of the world, and the Father of our spirits; or which most clearly and forcibly teaches the most exalted, and universal love of God and man.

But before I proceed to determine this point, I shall just observe, that the *old paths* to which the Jews were directed in the text, might signify that way of holiness which God had established from everlasting; or rather *those testimonies* that were delivered to them by Moses, and which might be called *old paths*, when compared with their own later wicked inventions, for which all the prophets successively threat-

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ened and condemned them. And the precept to them was of the same force, as if they had been taught to compare their own impious ways with those ways which God their Redeemer had taught them of old, and been directed to walk in the good way.

But when we apply the direction in the text to ourselves, it must not then be understood to lead us back to the *law*, but, on the contrary, to establish us in the good way of the *gospel*, in this best of all those ways, which the divine wisdom has appointed, and enabled us to discover.

As soon as the gospel appeared, the law, which was suited to different times and circumstances, could no longer be considered, when compared with it, to be the good way. And the more we now examine the gospel, the more and more will it approve itself, of all the different ways which the children of men have chosen from the foundation of the world, to be the most sure and plain way. All other ways, when compared with it, will appear dark and crooked.

crooked. This will be found to be most *pure and peaceable*, most *gentle and easy to be entreated*, most abounding in all *mercy and good fruits*, and without any *partiality or hypocrisy*.

In other words, if we enquire, and examine, for ever, with a constant eye to truth, and to truth only, the gospel of Jesus Christ will be found to be the most clear, and only infallible way to eternal life. *Him hath the Father sealed*, and Him hath the Father appointed to be the King and Head of his church. He was anointed with the spirit above measure. He was filled with the fulness of God. He spoke so as never man spoke. He, therefore, is the truly *good way*, and the *living way* unto the Father.

But here I may remark, that it is only because the most impartial enquiry must convince us of this, that we are required to consider him as such. Jesus, though he had all necessary power from the Father, never claimed, notwithstanding, that authority which many of his pretended suc-

cessors have assumed. He required our belief in himself, only upon the strength of those testimonies which the Father had given men of him. He amply confirmed his divine mission, by numberless most incontestable miracles. And we know, that with *him the Father was always well pleased*, because He has raised him from the dead, and taken him up into heaven, and poured out the holy Spirit upon the apostles after him. And we may, likewise, always know, from the *doctrines themselves*, if we deliberately examine them according to that sense of right and wrong which is originally made a part of our constitution, that *they are, demonstrably, from God.*

But I must, once more, observe upon this head, that the good way which Jesus taught is to be learned only from himself. He gave no power to his followers to exercise power over one another; nor appointed any set of fallible men to lead us blindfold in what they may decide to be his way. All human establishments, therefore, and all creeds and confessions of faith,
composed

composed by men, are contrary to this way. This way is to be known only from those who heard him ; and this, again, only from their own unquestionable records. *These* are the *good, old paths*, to all Christians. All human additions to these paths, instead of making them more plain, will only confound and mislead us.

Though we may, therefore, profitably use our commentators as helps, we must lay them aside as guides : we must reject all public acts of orthodoxy, and adhere to the New Testament only, if we would press right forward to our best interests. This, of itself, independently of all the different explications of it, that have been given by different men, and by different churches, is *the wisdom that descended from above*. We need only read, to see, and know this. We have only to read the scriptures daily, without prejudice, and prepossession, and to endeavour, whilst we read, to forget all other knowledge, and we shall feel with joy, from that peace of God which they administer to our hearts, that we are in the

good way. Experience will soon convince us, that these are the really good way. The farther we extend our enquiries, the more clearly, and certainly, shall we know, that *these are spirit*, and that *these are life*; and that our souls can rest fully satisfied upon no other ground.

But having thus shewn, which seems to be the best method of acquiring a thorough knowledge of our duty; and, at the same time, considered where this knowledge is revealed to us; it now remains to be briefly remarked, in the last place, that it is not sufficient to have found, by the full exercise of those faculties which God has given us, which is the good way, and to acknowledge no other, but that we must, likewise, *walk therein*, if we would seriously study to approve ourselves to God. *Stand in the ways, and see which is the good way, and walk therein, saith the Lord.*

To know the best way, in any case, can be of no advantage to us, if we walk in another way. To know the gospel, then, to be the way of *holiness*, and at the same time,

time, to live in allowed *wickedness*; or to know the gospel to admit no *encroachments upon conscience*, and, at the same time, to refuse *liberty of conscience to others*; or to know the gospel to be *of itself perfect*, and at the same time to submit to manifest *corrupt additions* to it; or to give any countenance to *human authority* in matters of faith, whilst we know the gospel to be against *all* such *human authority*, must render us unworthy of the gospel, must confessedly debar us of all its benefits, and likewise aggravate our guilt and punishment.

Our Lord, therefore, says, “If ye *know* “these things, happy are ye if ye *do* them.” And the apostle James, that “*faith without works is dead.*” And the apostle Paul, that “*the gift of prophecy, and of working of miracles, and all other spiritual possessions, are nothing, without brotherly love.*”

As Christians, then, to apply to ourselves the directions of the text, and, at the same time, to derive any consolation from them, **we must not only know what is that pure faith,**

faith, which was once delivered to the saints, but we must, likewise, in all respects, act suitably to it. We must endeavour to be sober and temperate, gentle and peaceable, pure in heart, holy in all manner of conversation, without wrath or animosity, kind and merciful, and walking humbly with our God, ever meditating upon his goodness, adoring him for all his benefits, and cheerfully acquiescing in all his dispensations.

Thus our Lord himself applied the words, when he said, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls.*

The word, which is here rendered *rest*, signifies *refreshment*. And the knowledge and practice of the gospel, and a constant imitation of our spotless guide and conductor, must, necessarily, above all other objects whatever, *refresh* us even in this life. We cannot faint in the way, whilst we walk in the light of *heaven*, and perceive that we are led by this light to heaven. What, indeed, can discourage us, or make

us

us afraid, when we consider that the conclusion of the whole will be everlasting life; or those refreshing, and infinitely satisfying pleasures, which flow at God's right hand for evermore? This was the grand object, for which the instructions in the text, and all the other divine admonitions that occur to us in the scriptures, were originally given. " Thus, saith the Lord, stand in " the ways, and see, and ask for the old " paths, where is the good way, and walk " therein, and ye shall find *rest* for your " souls."

Let us now, then, by way of improvement of what has been said, be taught, in the first place, to fix our thoughts upon this grand object.

Rest for the *soul*! This is the most desirable rest. This is a sufficient compensation for all troubles. This includes in it the removal of the bitterest sorrows; the removal of the burthen of sin, and shame, and death; and, likewise, the enjoyment of God to all eternity.

This,

This, then, is every thing that we can hope, or wish, or labour for.

Compared with this, what is the world ; and what are the things of the world ? What are millions of worlds ? What are all their wealth and honours ? What are all the pleasures, and gratifications, that can be prepared for the body ? What is fame ? What is wisdom ? What is health, and what is life itself ?

The sun, and the moon, and the planets, and the world, and every thing that we see around us will vanish and be forgotten ; or, if they were to continue for ever, will all soon be of no kind of use to us. The body itself must soon pass away. Besides, all its joys are momentary : they are, moreover, unsatisfying. Our health, and all our other present possessions are transient as the clouds that fly over our heads.

But when we once find *rest for our souls*, we shall find that which can never be taken away from us ; which is beyond the reach of every change, or accident.

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We can, then, look forward to an inconceivable fulness of perpetually encreasing bliss, through all the successive moments of a boundless eternity, as our own. We can, then, look up to the great God as our sanctuary, and everlasting Friend. We can, then, anticipate with the highest delight, our approaching communion and fellowship with Jesus, and with all the spirits of the just made perfect. And we can, then, stem the torrent of every affliction that shall befall us here, in hope of the glory hereafter to be revealed. For this is enough. This is the jewel of great price.

But nothing else is enough.

Could we surround the four quarters of the globe, and call every part of them our own, yet we know the time would come, when we should be constrained, however reluctantly, to confess, that all was vanity and vexation of spirit.

But the soul that entereth that rest, which the Lord has proposed to us, shall live for ever, and shall have full enjoyment for ever.

Here,

Here, then, let us fix our thoughts. Let us command down every high and proud imagination. Let us triumph over all the blandishments of sense, over every anxious care, over every slothful habit, and over every sinful passion ; and let us lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

But let us be taught, in the second place, seriously to consider, admire, and adore, the wonderful goodness and most marvellous loving kindness of God, who has called us to *this rest*.

What are we, the beings but of yesterday, that we should be begotten unto such lively hopes ? To what could all our services amount ; or, what could they merit, had we even never transgressed against him, in thought, or word, or deed ?

But we have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God. We should have often cut ourselves off from his favour, and incurred his displeasure, were he not infinitely gracious and long suffering.

And yet, he hath spared us. He yet continueth to offer to us his pardon and reconciliation.

conciliation. He yet entreateth us, by all his prophets, and by his own Son, to turn unto him that he may have mercy upon us. He, even now, would refresh our souls; refresh our souls for ever!

How, then, should we praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!

It is owing to his mercies that we are not consumed: still, he is willing to introduce us to all the riches of eternal life!

How surpassing all description is such love! How endearing! How joyful! How overwhelming to the attentive mind! And, how worthy our daily thanksgivings, and our constant, and devoutest meditations! God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Most emphatically, then, may He be styled, *The Father of all Mercies!*

Let us, therefore, be taught, in the third place, not to walk unworthy of such goodness, nor to abuse the riches of that forbearance and long-suffering, which would lead

lead us to repentance. Let us, therefore, shake off every idle habit, and indolent disposition, and seek the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.

God hath called us with an holy calling.
Let us be obedient to the heavenly voice.

God hath given us reason to examine, and an understanding to know the things that are true. Let us exercise and improve the great talents committed to our trust. Let us awaken all the powers within us, and with these divine assistants, look well about us; consider his perfections and will; and, all pride, and prejudices, and temporal interests aside, search out all the duties that we owe him.

We shall, otherwise, remain in ignorance, be agitated with various tumultuous doubts and fears, and be continually tossed about by every wind of doctrine, or lost in the destructive current of irresistible temptations. And our situation will be as inexcusable as it is deplorable; because God has commanded and enabled us to keep clear
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of all difficulties, and also made our duty plain and easy.

Let us not, then, be such enemies to ourselves, as to condemn his gifts, or to suffer them to become languid, or useless.

Particularly, after we shall have separated the wheat from the chaff; broken through every cloud of darkness; seen the light in its full splendour, or *found out* the *good* way, let us walk therein. For, if the ignorant, as has been just intimated, can have no plea to justify, or excuse themselves, much less can those have any, who sin with their eyes open.

We are, accordingly, informed from the best authority, that that servant who knew his Lord's will, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

As we again learn, *Obedience is better than sacrifice; and the knowledge, that is, the acknowledgement of the Lord, or an entire submission to all his pleasure, more than whole burnt offerings.*

Let us, therefore, be faithful in every good word and work.

Let us set our affections on the things that are above ; and daily grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. And let us endeavour to observe all the commandments of the One Lord, all our days, blameless, and we shall find **REFRESHMENT FOR OUR SOULS.**

D I S-

DISCOURSE III.

The first on this Text.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the scriptures.

AS man is capacitated to *know*, and to *understand* the things that are true, whilst it is clearly the will of the sovereign Jehovah, that we should apply the faculties he has given us to those wise and excellent purposes for which they were bestowed; and as the health, strength, and enjoyment of the mind, must necessarily depend on our endeavours to fulfil the noble designs of our Creator, I have, therefore, shewn you, that enquiry is a most important and essential duty; as honourable to our nature, as it is suitable to that rank we hold amongst the immensity of the works of God.

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Again,

Again, since a free and impartial enquiry must finally open to our view the holy scriptures, as a full, perfect, satisfying, and unerring guide to eternal life ; it hence demonstrably follows, that we should particularly, constantly, and seriously examine these, that, from our frequent and intimate intercourse with those divine instructions which they contain, we may build ourselves up in our holy faith, and make, daily, nearer approaches to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, until we shall at length have reached the summit of that perfection to which we are called.

We may, therefore, immediately perceive the force of the direction in the text ; and what reverential attention and obedience it demands.

The scriptures “ are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be perfected, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

As they, then, unfold to us the greatest possible advantages, we should, if we would

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be wise and happy, assuredly *search the scriptures.*

But the words were peculiarly emphatical, as addressed to the Jews. This people both gloried in the scriptures as a rule of life, and in their exact knowledge of them ; and yet, at the same time, rejected the long-expected Messiah, who was so fully and circumstantially pointed out to them in these very scriptures. After our Lord, therefore, in the preceding verses, had exposed their great obstinacy and hardness of heart, in not only not receiving that testimony which John had given them of him, but in not even receiving that testimony which the Father himself had given them ; he convicted them, likewise, in the words of the text, of the greatest blindness and ignorance, in not admitting that testimony which so fully abounded in their own scriptures concerning him. “ Search the scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life ; and these be they which testify of me.”

Now those scriptures to which our Lord here evidently referred, were only the scriptures of the Old Testament; for the scriptures of the New Testament had not as yet been fully revealed, nor had any part of them been committed to writing until several years after.

It is plain, however, from the argument subjoined, and on which our Lord founded his direction to the Jews, that the same direction, when applied to ourselves, implies that we are particularly required, and constrained, to search the scriptures of the New Testament. For, if it was incumbent on the Jews to search the scriptures of the Old Testament, because these testified of Christ, or predicted the time, and manner, and design of his coming, and his glorious achievements over sin and death; we certainly, much more, ought to search the scriptures of the New Testament, which so circumstantially relate all the actions of Christ, his life, and death, and resurrection and ascension, and likewise all his

DISCOURSE III.

•55

his doctrines and promises; which, in short, shew us the one Sovereign in all the riches of his love, and are the true and living way to the Father and eternal life.

But, having thus briefly proved, that though our Lord, in addressing himself to the Jews, spake only of the scriptures of the Old Testament, the precept, notwithstanding, now fairly implies, and with additional energy, our obligations to search, likewise, the scriptures of the New Testament, or the whole scriptures as they are at present commonly received amongst Christians; I shall proceed to shew, without any farther introduction, *why*, and how, we should apply ourselves to search these scriptures: and, as this is a subject of great importance, and to which I have paid some attention, I shall consider it more fully than I generally do most others that come before us.

We cannot, it is obvious, much concern ourselves *how* we should search the scriptures, nor indeed anxiously attend to any rules that can be given us on this head,

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unless

unless we be first convinced that we are under some particular obligations to search them ; and, in proportion as these shall be found the more or less weighty and important, we shall necessarily be the more or less disposed to observe such directions as offer themselves to our assistance.

I shall, therefore, first, endeavour to furnish you with the reasons, or arguments, why we should seriously exercise ourselves in searching the scriptures. And all these, I think, may be comprised under the following particulars : ‘ Because we profess them to be our rule of life ; because they contain the pure testimonies concerning Christ, whom we acknowledge to be the most endearing Messenger of the grace of God ; because they are, manifestly, the will of the most high God revealed to us ; because they contain the most excellent and important knowledge ; because they are our best preservative against vice, and our sure guide to perfection ; because they are even able to make us wise unto salvation ; and because they are never wearisome

D I S C O U R S E III. 57

' wearisome nor disgusting to the serious reader.'

The first argument that I shall mention *why* we should search the scriptures is, ' because we profess them to be our rule of life.

Even this argument is a good one : for,

We would, certainly, always choose to act a manly and honourable part, and not to appear in the light of those, who are ever running they know not whither, or assuming a character to which they are perfect strangers ; and we would not willingly be accounted irrational creatures, nor become objects of contempt to every capable judge, who makes any enquiry into our conduct.

But it needs scarcely to be observed, that it is always reproachful to us to be ignorant of our profession, whatever this be.

We could not suppress our indignation against the man who should attempt to teach the sciences, without having ever learned to read ; or teach to read, without being acquainted with the alphabet.

Even

Even to make profession of any common trade, and to appear constantly in the habitments of those who usually exercise this trade, and, at the same time, to be totally ignorant both of the theory and the practice of it, renders a man ridiculous and despicable: but, to be an entire stranger to his religious profession, renders a man still more ridiculous and despicable; indeed, lays a just foundation of not only charging him with folly and presumption, but of charging him even with madness.

For religion is not a concern between man and man, but between man and the Great Ruler of the universe. It is not a concern which affects us, as members of society only, but as the creatures and subjects of Almighty God. Nor is it an object which merely respects our condition in this world, but which respects our condition through eternity.

To pretend, then, that we have considered our obligations to God, which is implied in our making any profession of religion; and to pretend that we know what these

D I S C O U R S E III. 59

these obligations are, and that we desire to give them their due influence upon our minds; and, at the same time, never to have studied them; never to have understood any thing about them; never to have known but they might be the very contrary to what we would be thought to suppose them; and evidently not to care, whether they be such or not, is not only acting the fool and the deceiver in the face of man, but is offering a high mockery to God, our omnipotent Creator, our omniscient Governor, and our supreme Judge.

Besides, as rational, spiritual, and intelligent beings, it reflects the greatest disgrace upon us, to rise no higher than the beasts of the field; to be found in a slothful and indolent state; and not to furnish the mind, our better part, with such excellent employments as are suitable to it.

We should seriously consider that, whilst we give way to such degrading indolence, we may, with the shew of honouring our profession, load it with infamy; and whilst we think we are successfully vindicating it,
be,

be, in fact, railing against it in bitter language, and be only vindicating, under the name of it, some vile superstition, which is, in every particular, flatly repugnant to it.

In this manner, the Roman Catholic, and all the members of established churches, when vindicating popery, or any of their other different establishments, are, at the same time, reviling christianity; because they are labouring to justify what is at irreconcileable variance with it: and, whilst this is the case, we must be liable to be tossed about with every wind of doctrine; to be bewildered with our own ignorance; and to stumble, every moment, upon our own absurdities: for, being novices upon the subject, we cannot know what to defend, or what to oppose, when any attack is made upon us. We must, therefore, when drawn into a controversy, or when forced to give our opinion upon any subject that may be introduced, become the jest of our neighbours, and a just object of contempt to ourselves.

In

DISCOURSE III. 61

In other words, when one calls himself a Presbyterian ; when another calls himself an Episcopalian ; when others call themselves members of different religious professions ; and neither of them can give any account of the principles of those sects, to which they have severally united themselves, they appear exactly in the light of a man, who calls himself an architect, without being able to explain any of the principles of architecture. Thus ridiculous is the man, who calls himself a churchman, without being acquainted with the meaning of the word church ; and the man, who calls himself a Christian, whilst he is ignorant of the first principles of christianity.

We ought, therefore, either to make no profession at all, or frequently to search the scriptures, were it for no other reason than this, that we may shew ourselves men, who have understandings as well as other men ; or that we may maintain our claim to rationality, by being able to give to every one who asketh a reason of the hope that is in

us,

us, or which we virtually announce to the world to be in us.

But, secondly, a principal argument *why* we should search the scriptures, is because they contain the pure testimonies concerning Christ, whom we acknowledge to be the heavenly anointed, and the most endearing Messenger of the grace of God.

We have already seen how much it behoves us to be acquainted with our professions, were it only to escape contempt. This obligation, then, will increase and strengthen, in proportion to the dignity and importance of the profession we make, and the high excellence we ascribe to it.

We would not choose to appear ignorant of the beauty and intrinsic worth of any precious jewel in our possession, nor to be found, when asked, incapable of giving any satisfactory kind of description of it. Much less would we choose to be found boasting of some unspeakable treasure, pretended to be in our hands, when, for ought we knew, what we esteemed such, might be only an imaginary good, or something disgusting

gusting and burthensome, or detrimental to us. But this must be exactly our condition, when we glory in the gospel as our best inheritance, and, at the same time, have never known, nor examined, the design of the gospel; nor in any respect considered, whether it really be what it has been reported to us, and what we ourselves have usually supposed it.

Besides, as we must naturally desire to render supreme homage to God for his greatest blessings, it is necessary, to this purpose, that we previously know why any particular blessing is accounted such: otherwise, we cannot offer to him a reasonable service, but may so far impose upon ourselves, as to consider, as his blessings, the snares and delusions of the wicked, and all those things that are most inimical to us, and which have a direct tendency to make us unmindful of his most estimable blessings.

Let it be still farther observed, that, as it is in Him we live, and move, and have our being; and as we should, therefore, be hold

behold him as the author of every good and perfect gift; we should, in these circumstances, be thankful for all those benefits which we receive at his hands.

But, how can we be thankful for we know not what? And, how can we be sufficiently and devoutly thankful for the greatest benefits, unless we particularly, and seriously, consider, what these benefits are; whence they flow upon us; and how unmerited they are?

If we would not, therefore, be guilty of uttering expressions of gratitude, without any meaning: or, rather, if we would not be found destitute of every principle of real gratitude to the God who made us, we must search the scriptures, that we may be acquainted with those treasures of grace which they contain, or learn from them the marvellous extent of his great mercy towards us.

Besides, as by calling ourselves Christians, we declare ourselves the followers of Christ, we ought to have some idea of the

nature

nature of his kingdom, since, otherwise, we might as well pass under the name of the disciples of Mahomed or Confucius. For, who can, with any propriety, be styled his follower, who knows not what Christ himself was, or what he taught, and required of men ?

But how can this be ever known, unless we apply ourselves to the study of the scriptures ?

These are the only pure testimonies concerning Christ.

All our authentic information, either concerning him, or his doctrines, must be ultimately derived from these ; for it is to be found no where else.

If we look for this information to any other fountain, we may be wholly deceived ; find his plainest doctrines perverted, and his glorious character shamefully debased, and totally misrepresented.

But, in the scriptures, we have a particular and genuine account of all the prophecies relating to him, preceding his birth ; and, again, of all those prophecies

exactly fulfilled in his person. We, here, distinctly learn what he was, whence he came, what he taught, in what promises we are led to trust, and who are the children of his kingdom, and the heirs of eternal life.

Whilst we presume, therefore, even to name the name of Christ, we should search the scriptures, to know upon what foundation we stand, or what we are to expect or hope.

We must, otherwise, be a contradiction, and walk in thick darkness, whilst we would be accounted the children of the light. We must, otherwise, be in the situation of those travellers, who take no heed to their steps; or who, with a faithful guide at their right hand, and not knowing whither they are going, will neither consult him, nor be admonished by him: and thus, whilst we would be considered as the servants of Christ, we must dishonour both Christ and ourselves; be perpetually wandering, and stumbling, in slippery places, and become an easy prey to

the first adversary that besets us. In other words, we must always continue in a most ignominious and wretched state ; and when pluming ourselves upon our superiority to other men, be a just object of ridicule to the Infidel, to the Jew, to the Mahomedan, and even to the Pagan.

But, not only that we may appear rational and consistent beings, who would not be led blindfold, nor exposed to the reproach of professing we know not what, I have adverted to many other particular reasons, *why* we should search the scriptures, which I intend to illustrate in the following pages.

In the mean time, let us learn to maintain some degree of consistency in our character as professing Christians : and, as our labours to become masters of the principles of any particular vocation, should be always proportioned to the dignity and the solid advantages belonging to it, let us consider how earnestly we should labour to become masters of the principles of our Christian vocation.

To what a long course of servitude do numbers voluntarily subject themselves, to learn any of the common arts of life; by which, after they have learned them, they can only procure food and raiment? And, very frequently, at the time, when they were to have commenced masters, and to which they long looked forward with eager anxiety, they are suddenly removed from the land of the living!

Again: observe the merchant, how incessantly he toils to understand the nature and all the advantages of any particular branch of commerce. He mixes with every company who can furnish him with any information. He studies all the turns of fortune that lie before him; all the dangers that are to be guarded against, and all the probable schemes of adventuring with the greatest certainty of success. He turns the night into day in the prosecution of his object. He is ready, at all seasons, to submit to any fatigue, and to encounter all the extremes of the various contending elements. He passes through all climates: either

either approaches the freezing pole, or burns under the torrid suns of Africa ; and ransacks every quarter of the globe, both to acquire experience, and to seize every golden opportunity of rivalling all his fellows in the same line of unremitting exertion.

Even the soldier converts into a science, the different modes that may be pursued of shedding blood. He watches, and fasts, and perseveringly labours to invent new stratagems, or to improve upon old ones ; and contentedly exposes himself to sickness, wounds, captivity, and death, to acquire what he calls *glory*, by slaughtering the greatest possible number of his fellow-creatures.

Many others give no sleep to their eyes, nor slumber to their eye-lids, but work seven days in the week, to obtain a small portion of wealth or fame, which may not abide with them a day after they have obtained it ; and which, after they have left this world, can no more advantage them for ever.

Shall we, then, refuse to spend one day in the week, to become masters of the sublimest science; to examine the records of divine truth, and to lay up those treasures that can never fail?

Let us not reconcile ourselves to such a state of indolence and folly; but, as the children of the light, let us resolve to walk in the light: and, as those who are called unto liberty, let us hold fast that liberty, with which Christ has made us free.

DISCOURSE IV.

The second on this subject.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the Scriptures.

FROM these words, I proposed to shew,
why and *how* we should observe the im-
portant direction which they contain : and,
I remarked, that there are many cogent
arguments in support of the first proposi-
tion, which may be comprised under the
following particulars ; namely, ‘ because
‘ we profess the scriptures to be our rule
‘ of life ; because they contain the pure
‘ testimonies concerning Christ, whom we
‘ acknowledge to be the most endearing
‘ Messenger of the grace of God ; because
‘ they are, manifestly, the will of God re-
‘ vealed to us ; because they contain the
‘ most excellent and important knowledge ;

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‘ because

' because they are our best preservative
' against vice, and our sure guide to per-
' fection; because they are able to make
' us wise unto salvation; and because they
' are never wearisome, nor disgusting, to
' the serious reader.'

Having, in the preceding discourse, suf-
ficiently illustrated the two first particulars,
I shall, now, in the third place, lead your
attention to our high obligation to search
the scriptures, ' because they are the will
' of the most high God revealed to us.'

If we only believe this, it will be a suf-
ficient reason to examine, whether we have
formed a right judgment; or whether we
have only followed the dictates of prejudice,
or of a groundless prepossession.

I shall, probably, embrace another op-
portunity of illustrating this point, and of
shewing, that we are not under the delusion
of those, who receive as *divine*, a *cunningly
devised fable*.

I shall, however, just observe, at pre-
sent, that the purity and perfection of the
doctrines which the scriptures contain,
positively

positively declare that they have proceeded from the Father of lights, from the only incorruptible fountain of truth, from the God of all wisdom, and the only wise God.

Such doctrines, in such purity and perfection, were never taught in the antient or modern schools of philosophy; nor can they be collected from all the other books in the world besides, unless extracted from these: and yet, whereas other writers had every advantage of education, learning, and genius, the penmen of these were persons of the lowest occupation, were generally without any remarkable natural abilities, and ranked amongst the most illiterate of mankind.

Whence then is it, that shepherds and fishermen have been enabled to rise out of sight, above an Aristotle, a Plato, and a Socrates, in their teachings; and that the scriptures contain the only perfect system of morals, that was ever published to the world? Whence, we may say, such strength from so much weakness: and, on the other hand,

hand, such weakness from so much strength? This is, evidently, in no other way to be accounted for, than by admitting the divine original of the scriptures.

Besides, the full accomplishment of various succeeding prophecies, relating to extraordinary events which no human eye could discover nor even imagine; the astonishing miracles which attended the delivery of the law from the Mount; and the mighty power that accompanied Jesus during his ministry, and his apostles after him, demonstrably prove, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews affirms, that it was God, who, at sundry times and in diverse manners, spake to the fathers in time past by the prophets, and who hath spoken to us, in the last days, by his own Son.

Affuredly, then, if any object in the universe can demand our utmost attention, it must be the Almighty Sovereign of heaven and earth, in the adorable exercise of his mercy and grace, and in the marvellous condescensions of his love, manifested in the

the communications of his will concerning us.

We are, continually, his dependent creatures and beneficiaries. All our present enjoyments are entirely owing to his good pleasure ; and, on his will alone, can any of all our hopes of future happiness be founded. He doeth, according to his pleasure, in all the armies of heaven, and amongst all the inhabitants of the earth. And no being whatever, who counteracteth his will, can speak peace to his soul ; but must be, every moment of his opposition, posting to destruction.

But who can so fully, so clearly, and authoritatively reveal to us the will of God, as God himself ?

All human attempts to explore it may be vain : all human explications of it may be fallible and delusive.

But God cannot deny, nor misrepresent himself.

He can neither deceive, nor be deceived : nor can his infinite wisdom admit of giving us any wrong information, or any instructions

tions that do not powerfully lead to the security of our best interests.

As, therefore, God hath spoken to us in the scriptures, these must contain the most clear and perfect will of God; and, consequently, our path through life must be most effectually illuminated, and the rectitude of our conduct be most essentially supported, by our knowledge of this will.

We should, therefore, search the scriptures, if we would either regard the favour of God, or make it a matter of concern to know what are the purposes of his wisdom relating to us, and in what manner we should endeavour to please him.

We should delight to search the scriptures, if we would thoroughly understand any thing of the goodness, mercy and truth of God; or be at all solicitous to be informed for what ends he has designed us, what services we owe him, and what duties we should cultivate and practise, to escape his displeasure, and to obtain his loving kindness.

No other concerns whatever can be of such infinite importance to us; can so deservedly

servedly awaken our most earnest attention, or give such a sweetnes and spirit to all our labours. We must strangely neglect our own interests, therefore, and forget our own dignity, when we would rather, in any respect, devote ourselves to the wisdom of this world.

Nay, even to refuse our supreme reverence for the will of God, is a mark of blindnes, as well as of impiety. The will of the great and honourable, the will of the learned and the mighty, and the will of the most puissant monarch who ever swayed a scepter, are all weakness and folly when compared with this ; and are all, therefore, when preferred to this, marks of the greatest servility, degeneracy, and meanness.

Besides, the wisdom of this world darkens and confounds us ; involves us in numberless perplexing cares ; and can present no object to our eager thought, that is not precarious, unsatisfying, and perishing.

But the wisdom that descended from above, enlighteneth the eyes, giveth understanding

derstanding to the simple, establisheth peace in the heart, and endureth for ever ; and is, therefore, the very wisdom that becomes the creatures of this wisdom, to study, to admire, and meditate upon, with continually encreasing pleasure and affection.

But this leads me to consider, in the fourth place, that we are, likewise, under the strongest obligations to search the scriptures, because they contain the most excellent, useful and satisfying knowledge. This will clearly follow from the supposition that they are the revealed will of God. For as He is the fountain of wisdom ; the only fountain of all wisdom ; what he has taught us must be infinitely more pure, and profitable, and delightful, than any other instructions we can possibly receive.

It should, also, be considered, that knowledge is naturally as desirable and refreshing to the mind, as light is to the eyes, or food to the body.

We accordingly find, that the discovery of every new truth, brings with it an unspeakable

speakable additional pleasure; and, above all other objects, charms, animates, and rejoices the heart.

But those truths, especially, which fully display the divine perfections, and represent the great God to us, not in a tyrannical and forbidding light, but as our adorable Friend and Father: those truths, especially, I say, must be most sweet and delightful to us, must most powerfully reconcile us to all the dispensations of providence, and cheer and console us in the midst of adversity.

Again, those truths which lead us to the most intimate acquaintance with ourselves; which shew us our own characters in the strongest point of view; and which not only represent to us every imperfection and defect in our tempers, inclinations, and pursuits, but which, likewise, unfold to us a method of deliverance from every thing that is burthensome, painful, and dishonourable: those truths, also, must be of the most salutary, and of the noblest kind.

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The books, therefore, where those truths are to be found, and are most illustriously displayed, must contain the most valuable, and illuminating knowledge.

But the holy scriptures; the holy scriptures only, are those books.

This conclusion is demonstrable from all those arguments which prove, that they contain the revealed will of God.

They must be necessarily pure, and perfect, since they have proceeded from the fountain of all wisdom and knowledge. And what we would all wish, and hope, and expect, according to the obvious deductions of reason, happy experience will convince every man, who enters upon the trial, to be really the case.

All other books whatever, unless they be such as are drawn up under the guidance of those directions which are given us in the scriptures, are lame, defective, and confused, in their several numberless attempts, to ascertain the character of the ever blessed God.

But,

But in the scriptures, He is most clearly and invitingly represented to us, in the adorable dress of love.

He is here described as the One, Only, Peerless Jehovah, the Supreme and Omnipotent Spirit, by whose word the heavens and the earth were created; by whose power and wisdom the immense universe is continually upheld and governed; who is present with, and whose tender mercies are always over all his works; and without whose leave not so much as a sparrow can fall to the ground.

Here, likewise, we receive the fullest insight into our own situation and characters. Our weaknesses and wants are all laid open. Our errors and transgressions are all clearly detected. Our hearts are searched through and through; and we are made to see and to feel, where our only strength and security lie. We are taught that our treasures are not here; that poverty is not our greatest misfortune, nor riches our greatest bliss. And, when we can feed our hopes upon none of the possessions of

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this transitory scene, we are taught to draw near to God, with a pure heart; to cast all our cares and burthens upon him; and are encouraged, if we love him and keep his commandments, to look forward to everlasting peace and rest under the shadow of his wings.

It will appear, then, from these cursory observations, as I have already intimated, that such rational, sublime, and reviving knowledge, is to be derived from no other source whatever.

All other sources, to which we have access, are, in general, cloudy and unsatisfying; and, in many cases, doubtful and perplexed.

But this approves itself to be the bright luminary from heaven, which opens the eyes, and throws a full light into the mind. The Psalmist, therefore, says, “I have
“ more understanding than all my teachers;
“ for thy testimonies, O Lord, are my me-
“ ditation. I understand more than the
“ antients; because I keep thy precepts.”
And again, “How sweet are thy words

“ unto

" unto my taste ! Yea, sweeter than honey
" and the honey comb !"

If we would, therefore, attain the most excellent and important knowledge, the knowledge of the great God and of his providence ; if we would behold the whole universe as one beautiful theatre, and all the various scenes that are passing in it as wonderfully regulated to produce the greatest harmony and good, under his omnipresent, and omniscient eye ; if we would banish from us all the chaos of paganism, all the despondency of infidelity, all the gloom and horror of atheistical melancholy, and rise to those joys, which flow upon us, from discovering the glorious perfections of God ; from observing that his throne is everlasting, that his wisdom, and power, and goodness, are boundless and unchangeable, that all his works shew forth his praise ; that he will rule for ever, and for ever be the refuge of all those who put their trust in him : and if we would attain the most exact knowledge of ourselves, of our great origin and distinction, and of those

things that most intimately concern us, through all the revolutions of time : in short, if we would acquire that knowledge which principally ennobles and exalts the human mind ; which will triumph over all those monuments of genius that this world has ever produced ; and which will be infinitely important to us, through all the successive ages of a boundless eternity ; our readiest, our only sure way to this, is to search the scriptures, to seize those rich treasures which they contain, to drink freely of those living waters with which they flow, and which they universally diffuse.

But this brings me to mention another argument to this purpose, which is indeed implied in what I have been just urging, namely, as I was to observe in the next place, that we should search the scriptures, because they are our best preservatives against vice ; against that which is peculiarly degrading and ruinous to us ; which is ever at variance with all our interests, and is attended with pain and shame, and all the horrors

horrors of the most excruciating punishment.

We should, surely, decline no labours, however arduous, to guard ourselves against so great an evil, and to become completely triumphant over it.

But no other writings whatever, besides those we are now considering, mark out, in the clearest lines, the exact boundaries between vice and virtue; or flash such conviction upon the mind, concerning the tendency, as well as the different natures of the one and of the other.

Other writings, indeed, represent many vices as virtues, which at once appear, in the scriptures, without the help of arguments, to be real vices.

And though many other writings most eloquently declaim against vice in general, yet they too commonly leave it, in all its particulars, in the full possession of our affections.

They do not come with that authority which always commands attention: nor do they speak with that force to the heart,

which opens our eyes to the things that belong to our peace.

They have a studied acuteness without energy; elaborate reasonings without evidence; and an abundance of persuasive entreaties without sufficiently awakening motives.

But the scriptures, with the utmost of nature's simplicity, and yet with an authority decidedly descending from heaven, pluck up vice by the roots; expose it in that form of wretchedness and infamy, which cannot be beheld without horrour and aversion; and, like a two-edged sword, cut it down on every side, and destroy all its influence over us. They represent it, as it is in fact, universally accompanied with disgrace and misery: they detect it in all its haunts, and in all its different dressses, and shew us the concealed poison, which it always carries with it, under its most pleasurable and alluring forms.

Whilst, therefore, we maintain an intimacy with the scriptures, we can no more be drawn into the commission of vice, than

we

we can knowingly indulge and cherish our deadly and implacable enemy. And this argument alone might be thought sufficiently weighty to influence us to follow the direction in the text, and to embrace those golden opportunities, with which we are graciously furnished, for overcoming the world, and escaping the most tremendous of all evils.

But this will be farther evident, when we consider the great efficacy of the scriptures to lead us to perfection and salvation; which, with some other arguments in support of the doctrine of the text, I propose to illustrate in the following discourse: after which, I shall endeavour to shew, particularly, *how* we should always apply ourselves to search the scriptures to the best advantage.

In the mean time let us learn, from what has been said, both the importance of the scriptures, and the importance of our bestowing all due attention upon them. And, if there be those around us who manifest designs to debar us of the use of

the scriptures, or to impress us with a dislike or aversion to them, let us consider such designs as levelled against our best interests; and let us be persuaded, that all those who endeavour to practise such designs against us, are our most pernicious enemies, who would tyrannize over us, and rob us of our richest inheritance. Let us be fully persuaded, that they would keep us in slavery and darkness; make us fools and hypocrites; bereave us of all the privileges of rational beings; leave us a prey to every iniquity; and banish the highest consolation and joy from our hearts.

Let us, therefore, not suffer ourselves, by our own indolence, to sink into that wretched and ignominious state, into which the very *foolish*, or the very *wicked*, the *empty scowler*, or the proud, covetous, and ambitious, would villainously enslave us.

But let us open our understandings to the things that are true.

Let us rejoice in that wisdom which descended from above.

Let

Let us walk worthy of the high privileges with which we are favoured, and the heavenly vocations with which we are called.

Let wisdom influence us ; let integrity guide us : and let us act as those servants, who have not here any abiding city; and who would be always ready to receive the approbation of their Lord at his coming ; and to enter upon those joys, which, from the foundation of the world, are prepared for all the faithful children of God.

you will be sorry
when you see how I have changed
since our last meeting - my place
is now a quiet one - and I have
nothing to do but to live
on the interest of my savings
and the small sum I get from
my wife - I have nothing to do
but to live on the interest of my savings
and the small sum I get from

my wife

DISCOURSE V.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the scriptures.

[*Discourse the Third, on this Subject.*]

I Proposed, from these words, to enforce, in the first place, our obligations to attend to the precept which they contain ; and to shew, in the next place, *how*, or in what manner, we shall most fully testify our cordial, and entire compliance with it.

I have, already, argued that we ought to search the scriptures, because we profess them to be our rule of life ; because they contain the pure testimonies concerning Christ, whom we acknowledge to be our divinely appointed Lord and Master ; because they are, manifestly, the will of the most high God revealed to us ; because they contain the most satisfying and useful know-

knowledge ; and because they are our best preservative against vice and misery.

I now proceed to shew, that we are under the strongest obligations to search the scriptures, because they are our sure guide to perfection ; because they are able to make us wise unto salvation ; and because they are never wearisome, nor disgusting to the serious reader.

All these arguments together, I should think, must work a conviction in every rational mind ; and rouse us to be active and vigilant, faithful and persevering, in our endeavours to understand the records of divine truth.

But, having endeavoured, in the two preceding discourses, to illustrate briefly the five first arguments, I shall now consider, in the sixth place, ‘ the great and unparalleled excellency of the scriptures to establish us in every excellency and perfection ; ’ and shall hence observe our indispensable obligations to be fully acquainted with them.

To

To this purpose, you may perceive that, whilst the authors of other writings frequently give us fine lessons of virtue, they too commonly, notwithstanding, treat it as a mere chimerical object, beyond the reach of humanity: and whilst they pretend to admire and love it, and to raise in us an unabating ambition to attain it, they but too pathetically, at the same time, declare, as Paul represents a man in his degenerate state, that though *to will is present with them, yet how to perform that which is good they know not* *.

But the scriptures give us examples of all these fine lessons carried into practice,

* An illustrious heathen poet has said to the same purpose, *Video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor.* The same poet frequently discovered his ignorance of the *meliora*, and unblushingly represented himself as addicted to practices, which cannot be decently mentioned. What ideas must we, then, form of the *deteriora*, which he confessedly pursued, contrary to the maxims of his very limited *meliora*? And, what then must have been our own situation without the light of the gospel? This should be particularly considered by those persons, who now continue to quote the poet, in support of their total disregard to all moral obligations.

and

and even furnish examples which greatly eclipse them all.

Besides, the lessons of virtue that are recorded for our instruction in the scriptures, are greatly superior to all those that we meet in any other writings. Let us only consider our Lord's sermon upon the mount as a full proof of this.

' Blessed are the meek: blessed are the poor in spirit: blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: blessed are the pure in heart: blessed are the merciful: blessed are the peace-makers: blessed are the persecuted for righteousness sake: resist not evil: him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away: love your enemies: bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use and persecute you.'

Again, when we hear our Lord warning us, ' Judge not that ye be not judged:' or, ' be ye not as the hypocrites are, who only would be seen of men:' or when we hear him instructing us, ' It is not every one who saith, Lord, Lord! who shall enter into the kingdom of heaven:'

or,

or, when we hear him comprising the whole of our duty, in ‘the love of God and of our neighbour;’ or teaching us, ‘that we should love others as ourselves, and do to all others as we would that they should do to us:’ what is there in all antiquity besides, that so forcibly commendeth every thing that is true, excellent, praiseworthy, and of good report, or that carrieth virtue to such a high pitch of perfection?

Again, if we only examine the history of Joseph, what is there, in all heathen antiquity, that can be mentioned, which is so well calculated to keep us in a constant subjection to all the laws of God, through all the unexpected, and astonishingly variegated scenes of life?

Again, to support us under the most accumulated distress, what is there that can equal, or bear any kind of comparison with our Lord’s consolatory discourse to the disciples, a little before his sufferings? Or, to rouse the supine and unreflecting sinner from his wretched and ignominious state, what is there, in all the other books

in the world, so pathetically powerful, as the parable of the prodigal son?

Besides, whilst other writings only imperfectly describe to us what the authors would wish men to be, we have, in the scriptures, clouds of witnesses, who even exceeded the wishes of such authors; *who walked before God in all holy conversation and godliness*; and who, triumphing over the world, and holding fast their integrity to the end, *all died in the faith*.

And we have, here, one particular glorious example, who was without spot or blemish, and who was always doing the will of his and our Father, who is in heaven.

Thus is vice dethroned from its highest seat, and virtue recommended to us, with an eloquence not to be resisted.

The psalmist, therefore, says, though acquainted only with a part of the sacred writings, ‘ Thy word have I hid within my heart, that I should not sin against thee.’ Again, he puts the question, ‘ Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his

' his way?' and emphatically answers, ' by taking heed thereto,' or watching over it, ' according to thy word ;' signifying, that all other methods, comparatively speaking, would be vain and ineffectual, or, at least, without any certainty of success.

He again says, ' The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.'

From which we may conclude, that he esteemed all other laws, when considered in opposition to this, as without any prevailing efficacy or power.

But the apostle Paul says, after he became acquainted with the whole scriptures, with the unspeakable treasures of the gospel, as well as with the divine instructions of the law and the prophets in the Old Testament, ' I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me ;' signifying, that no temptation was invincible, nor any virtuous endeavours too arduous, thro' the life, doctrines, promises, resurrection and glory of Christ, continually presented to the attentive mind.

He again says, to the same purpose,
‘ Thanks be unto God, who giveth us
‘ the victory through our Lord Jesus
‘ Christ ;’ signifying, that after all other
means have failed, the gospel is sufficient
to deliver us from the dominion of sin.

He says, again, shewing himself to be
completely triumphant, ‘ Neither death,
‘ nor life, nor principalities, nor powers,
‘ nor things present, nor things to come,
‘ shall be able to separate me from the love
‘ of God, which is in Christ Jesus our
‘ Lord.’

Indeed, the instructions and example of
the apostle himself, and of many other
good men recorded in the sacred writings,
have a mighty force to raise us above the
world, and its lusts, and to exalt us to that
perfection and holiness, which are necessary
to our acceptance with God.

But, above all, whilst we look unto
Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,
who, for the joy that was set before him,
endured the cross, and despised the shame
thereof, our hearts, in all circumstances,

must

must be fixed in the practice of what is good ; we must be stedfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.

If we would, therefore, conquer our worst enemy, sin ; and, by keeping a conscience void of offence, have always confidence towards God, as the Father of mercies, and our sure refuge and tower of defence, we must search the scriptures.

These chain down the monster sin under our feet ; and lead to the full possession of every virtue which can adorn the heart.

These supremely aggrandize our rational natures ; and in prosperity or adversity, through evil report or good report, in life or in death, infuse the most substantial joys into the soul.

Our Lord, therefore, says, ‘ Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world ;’ signifying, that we, also, may overcome. Again, ‘ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls.’ Again, we are to consider, on the one hand, that ‘ the wicked shall go away into ever-

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' lasting punishment ;' but, on the other hand, that ' the righteous will be admitted into life eternal.' And, as we may become righteous by learning of Christ, that we may neglect no opportunity of becoming such, to all the righteous is this blessed assurance given, ' Ye shall find refreshment to your souls.'

Now this is the most persuasive of all arguments, both to redeem us from sin, and to establish us in all righteousness, and goodness, and truth : or,

As I was to observe, in the next place, we should be especially persuaded to search the scriptures, ' because they are able to make us wise unto salvation ;' that is, as the apostle means, they are fully sufficient to this purpose. For, here, we have the true way to eternal life, written in such plain characters, that he that runs may read it. And, here, we have the great God represented as ready to be reconciled to us, as offering us pardon and acceptance, whilst we are yet afar off, and as willing and desiring that all may be saved.

Here,

Here, again, we are not only taught and enabled, how to live godly in Christ Jesus, but we are, likewise, guarded against all iniquity, by observing, that her steps take hold on hell: and we are confirmed, supported, and held fast, in a course of holiness, by learning that the reward of holiness will be an eternal inheritance in the heavens. And,

Here, we have all those divine promises, after which our souls naturally hope, established beyond the possibility of failing.

We are taught to rely on the faithfulness of the immutable God. And Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, and our forerunner into the mansions of the blessed, hath, through his own resurrection, which was effected by the manifest omnipotent operation of God, brought life and immortality to light; and demonstrably assured us, that, because he liveth, we shall live also; and that, where he is gone, we shall likewise go, if we follow his steps.

We have, here, in short, every motive, direction, assistance, and encouragement,

to make us pure and holy in all manner of conversation ; and every assurance we could wish, that we shall not labour in vain in the Lord. Here we see sin divested of its power ; and hell and death led captives before our eyes ; and the heavens opened for our reception ; and glory, and honour, and immortality, descending upon us. And, as we continue the search, we proportionably encrease in strength ; we mount up with wings as eagles ; we look down upon the world as a transient toy ; and, from the glory that shall hereafter be revealed, we are prepared for all events, and even willing to depart, and be with Christ.

Surely, then, all these things put together, are sufficient to raise our affections to the best goods ; and to support us, through all the various struggles which can await us, in running the race that is before us.

If we would, therefore, discover any regard to our immortal interests ; if we would, moreover, infallibly secure these interests ; if we would ever love, and be beloved by our heavenly Father ; or, if we would procure

cure peace and rest, and salvation to our precious souls, we must search the scriptures.

These are a tree of life to all who rightly use and improve them ; or a fountain of living water, which descended from heaven, of which he who drinketh shall never thirst. These, therefore, should be estimated above gold, above much fine gold ; and should be always a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path.

But it may be once more observed, as I proposed to shew in the last place, that the scriptures are never wearisome nor disgusting to the serious reader.

This is known to all those who bestow any kind of attention upon them, and best known to those who study them the most.

It is known, at the same time, that we become tired of most other writings, after we have read them once or twice over.

But we may return to the scriptures again and again a thousand times, with increasing pleasure, and still meet with some object to delight and charm us. Let any

one try, for example sake, the 14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th chapters of John's gospel; or our Lord's parables, and other discourses; or the apostle Paul's description of charity; or many of the psalms; not to mention an abundance of other particular select passages, and he will find that the oftener he reads them the better he is pleased, and the more he is inclined to read them again.

But let any one make the same trial of any other writings in the world, and he will find the consequence to be totally different.

Other writings, indeed, are generally so laboured, formal, and systematical, that we soon lose all relish for the re-perusal of them: but, in the scriptures, the attention is always engaged by native simplicity and beauty; and, instead of being obliged to turn over some hundreds of pages to come at the discovery of some truth, we have the most refreshing truths in almost every page; and can never travel far without meeting with that jewel of great price, which fully satisfies the soul, and swallows

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up all the affections in the contemplation of it.

And whereas other writings can frequently afford no consolation to the dejected mind, these are a sovereign remedy for every complaint. They pour such a flood of light into the soul, concerning the love and grace of God, that there can remain nothing to make us greatly uneasy, unless we labour under the burthen of sin: nor can there be any thing in the world to alarm us, if we be followers of God as dear children. For he will never leave nor forsake his children, but will give them light in darkness, and be present with them, and comfort them at all times.

Therefore, to learn to be such; to know that we are such; and to be constantly exercising the mind, in receiving the glorious privileges of all such, must be our most delightful study.

And, therefore, if we would read, and not be weary; if we would read, and rejoice at the same time; if we would always read to obtain pleasure, and to strengthen and

and enliven the heart; and if, whilst we read, we would rise above all the crosses and vexations of the world, we must repeatedly apply ourselves to search the holy scriptures. The psalmist, therefore, says, ‘ O how I love thy law; it is my meditation all the day ! ’ And again, ‘ Thou art my hiding place and my shield; I hope in thy word ! ’

Your own reflections may furnish you with many additional observations in support of all those arguments which I have endeavoured to lay before you.

However, from what has been already said, I think myself fully justified to conclude, that we are under the most forcible and important obligations, to apply ourselves to a frequent examination of the scriptures.

We cannot, otherwise, maintain the character of rational beings, whilst we profess them to be our rule of life; and would, consequently, be supposed intimately acquainted with them.

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We cannot, otherwise, indeed, with any consistency, call ourselves the disciples of Christ; by which it is, at least, implied, that we have studied his doctrines, and that we look up to them as the standard of our conduct.

We cannot, otherwise, sufficiently reverence the wisdom of God, nor give unto him the glory that is due to his holy name: for, as he, above all beings, demands our highest praises, his will, above all other considerations, requires our supreme attention, our most cheerful acquiescence, and our devoutest heartfelt acknowledgments.

We cannot, otherwise, discover any real concern to store our minds with the most satisfying and purifying knowledge.

We cannot, otherwise, adopt the most direct means of emancipating ourselves from the servitude of sin, and of becoming perfect in our measure and degree, as our heavenly Father is perfect.

We cannot, otherwise, make the best preparations for eternity, nor worthily regard the goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering

suffering of God, which would lead us to repentance and salvation.

Nor can we, otherwise, make choice of the most rational and daily improving pleasures; pleasures which are never wearisome nor disgusting, but continually more and more refreshing, strengthening, and delightful to the soul.

Upon those objects, therefore, which lay us under the strongest obligations, our attention should be most intensely fixed.

These should take full possession of the mind, and exclude every thing inferior, when put in competition with them.

We should not prefer trifling toys to estimable jewels: nor omit, nor neglect, doing any thing essential to our safety and happiness, to indulge in indolence, to escape the ridicule of fools, or to avoid any temporary inconveniences.

We should seriously and indefatigably endeavour to secure our highest interests; to establish the best principles; to lay up treasures of wisdom; and to be always advancing to perfection, in opposition to all
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the cares, vexations, and disquietudes, of a tumultuous world.

We should be ever, therefore, infinitely grateful to our almighty Creator and Benefactor, for so unspeakable a blessing as the holy scriptures ; for his great goodness in putting so invaluable a possession into our hands, which, whilst it peculiarly enriches and ennobles the mind, fills it with the most glorious hopes, communicates to us the highest comforts, and raiseth us to an immortal and unfading crown of glory.

If we should be thankful for that which is least, how supremely thankful should we be for that which is greatest ? Or, if we should be thankful for those wonderful instincts, which lead us to watch over the concerns of this present life ; if we should be thankful for all those capacities which raise us above the other creatures of this world, and for all the passing enjoyments of every passing moment, how infinitely more thankful should we be for so unspeakable a gift, for so ennobling a treasure, as
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the holy scriptures, our clear and unerring guide to all the enjoyments of eternal life!

We should bless the God of all wisdom and knowledge, the Father of mercies, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for so precious a gift, and inestimable pledge of his love to men.

And, whilst we reflect that he has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the gospel of his grace, we should not be unmindful of any of his benefits.

We should not abuse the indulgence of his forbearance and long-suffering, by a shameful contempt, or refusal of it.

We should love him with all the heart; delight to do his will; and be all obedience to his voice.

We should, therefore, repeatedly and seriously consider, what answer shall we be able to make at the great day of accounts, if we reject his counsel, and cast his reproof behind us? What justification shall we have to offer in arrest of judgment? Or, how shall we escape, if it shall then appear,

D I S C O U R S E V. III

appear, that we fools have despised instruction, and neglected his great salvation ?

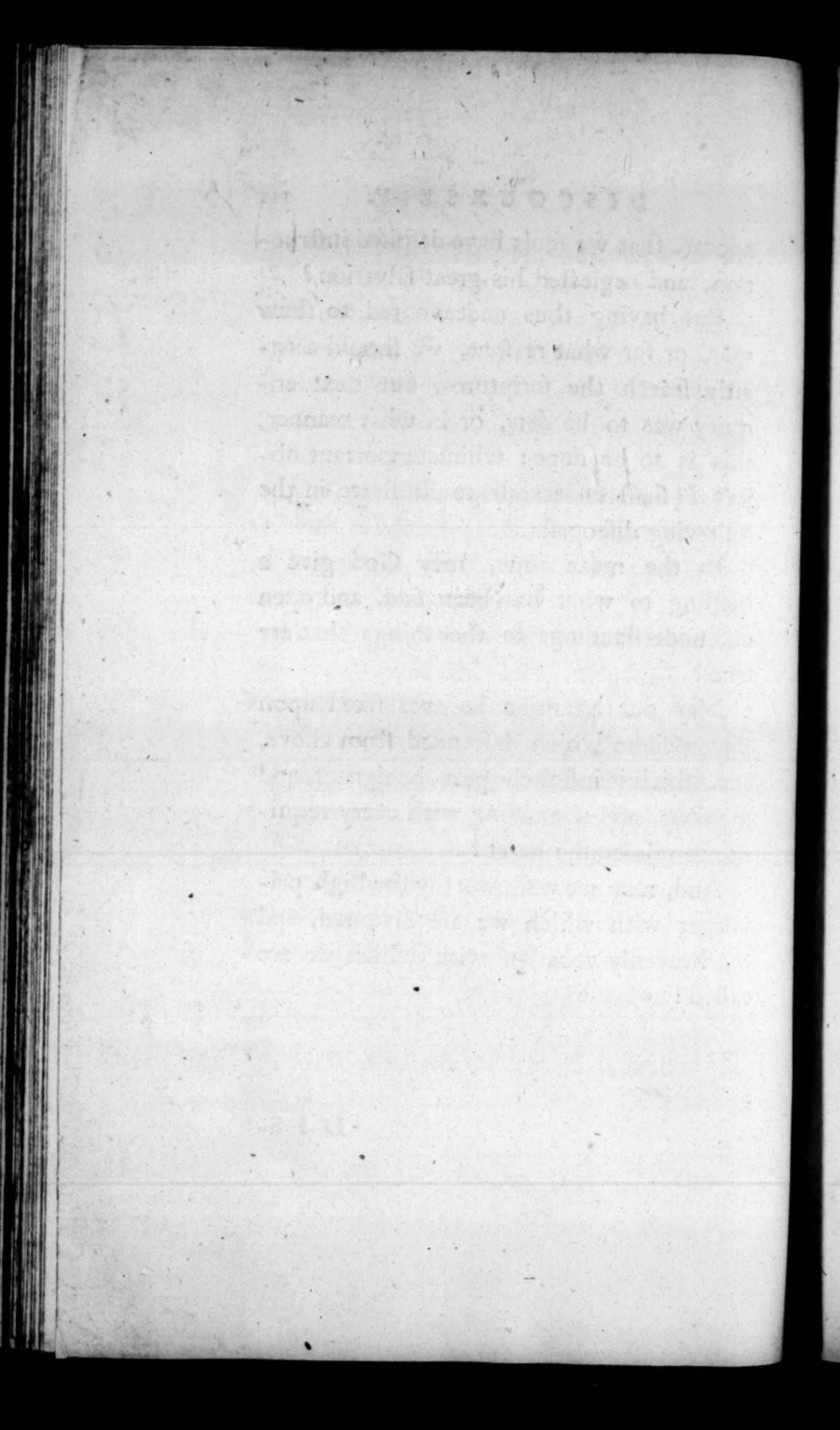
But having thus endeavoured to shew *why*, or for what reasons, we should earnestly search the scriptures, our next enquiry was to be *how*, or in what manner, this is to be done : which important object I shall endeavour to illustrate in the following discourses.

In the mean time, may God give a blessing to what has been said, and open our understandings to the things that are true !

May our attention be ever fixed upon that wisdom which descended from above, and which is infinitely pure, benignant, and gracious, and abounding with every requisite to rejoice the heart !

And, may we walk worthy the high privileges with which we are favoured, and the heavenly vocation with which we are called !

D I S-



DISCOURSE VI.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the Scriptures.

[*Discourse the Fourth on this subject.*]

HAVING already considered the reasons or arguments *why* we should pay all due attention to this important and gracious exhortation, it now remains that I endeavour to shew, as was proposed in the second place, *how*, or *in what manner*, we shall search the scriptures to the best purpose, and so that we may continually profit by the repetition of our enquiries.

The direction, like many others, may be complied with in a certain sense, without answering the design of our Lord; as we may set apart a particular portion of time to any other select exercise or employment, and yet, for want of a proper attention to

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the business in which we are engaged, be all the while labouring in vain.

We may, for instance, read the scriptures as a task, and even submit to the resolution of not allowing a day to pass, in which we do not read a determinate number of chapters; and yet, if in all this labour we have no other view than the acquisition of some distinguished imaginary merit, for having merely applied ourselves to such a task, we shall constantly finish just where we first began, with scarcely advancing a single step in the way of knowledge, though we have habituated ourselves a number of years to this practice. Our Lord, therefore, does not say *read*, but *search the scriptures*.

He never laid a stress upon external services, any farther than these were so attended as to become happily instrumental in enlightening the understanding, and improving the heart.

As he knew that we might hear, and cast reproof behind us; and that we might call him Lord, and not obey the will of our

our heavenly Father; he knew, in like manner, that we might read, and neither consider, regard, understand, or apply, what we read. He has, therefore, guarded us against the abuse, or misapplication, of his direction in the text, as he has, at other times, guarded us against the abuse, or misapplication of his other instructions, by requiring us not to *repeat*, or *turn over*, but to *search the scriptures*. And this implies, that we examine them with the utmost attention and care; and that we acquire, as much as possible, a general view of the doctrines of the whole, as well as consider the force and meaning of each select passage considered in itself.

We may read them over an hundred times, and not search them; as we may pass through a garden an hundred times, without taking any particular account of the productions it contains; or pass through a cabinet of curiosities an hundred times, without knowing, or rightly considering, the nature, value, or beauty of any of those articles of which it is composed.

We may even, in some measure, get the scriptures by heart, and not search them; as we may a particular number of names, without attending to the meaning of any one of them singly.

To *search*, the attention must be awake: some degree of labour and study is required: we must take a full view of every object that comes in our way, and consider the purposes for which it is presented to us; or, in other words, we must carefully examine all that the scriptures teach us to believe, and likewise all the several duties which they teach us to practice, and particularly apply these to ourselves, as much as we respect them in their general relation to all the children of men.

And, to this purpose, ‘ we must search
‘ them without prejudice: we must search
‘ them as they stand connected together:
‘ we must search them without being un-
‘ der the bias of our passions: we must
‘ search them not as a matter of curiosity,
‘ or for the sake of mere science: we must
‘ search them, not as calculated for parti-
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'cular circumstances only, but for all circumstances: and we must search them early and continually.'

In the first place, if we wish to examine the scriptures to any valuable purpose, 'we must lay aside all prejudice, or pre-conceived opinions concerning them.'

Unless we do this, we shall always force them to speak our own sentiments, and shall never become much wiser from our acquaintance with them. We shall, in this case, put light for darkness, and darkness for light; call evil good, and good evil; and shall always fancy that we find in them whatever favourite opinions we before flattered ourselves they must contain.

A Roman Catholic, under this bias, will discover in them his purgatory and transubstantiation; and even a Pagan will discover in them his paganism. The one will say, Did not Jesus preach to the spirits in prison, and call the bread which he brake his body? And the other will say, Is there not mention made of the Gods of the hills and of the vallies? A mere shadow will be

mistaken by such a one for a reality, and his imagination will be so fixed upon this, as to annihilate the most positive demonstrations to the contrary. For, to read the scriptures with prejudice, implies that we judge or determine before hand, what doctrines they contain, and that we read them only to produce in ourselves some shew of argument in confirmation of these doctrines.

To search the scriptures with prejudice, then, is, in fact, a contradiction. For, by searching them at all it is implied, that we seriously enquire what they, of themselves, clearly require us to believe and practise, independently of what all others may have represented them to require, and independently of any previous notions which we ourselves may have formed concerning them.

In other words, we should sit down to the study of the scriptures, as to the study of a book containing a revelation from God addressed to all his rational offspring in this world; and all the doctrines of which have

a certain determinate meaning, without any retrospect to the pleasure of any creature.

And, fully to understand all those truths which they propose to us, as these are in themselves, we should labour as much as possible to forget all other knowledge, and to keep out of sight every particular explication that has been given of them by others: we should suppose, that there are no such creeds, or established articles of faith in the world, as have been pretended to be deduced from them; and we should take them up as a new book which had never been opened, but which, we know, contains the will of God; and we should, then, endeavour to discover, according to their own plain and obviously consistent language, what sentiments and practices they universally inculcate, what prospects they open to our attentive view, and upon what terms they assure us of the everlasting favour and friendship of God. It is in this manner only, that we can ever justly hope to attain any tolerable knowledge of the scriptures.

But those who are under the influence of prejudice, see every thing in a wrong light; substitute sounds in the place of things; catch at phantoms whilst they neglect the substance; multiply objects that have no existence; and pass over real and important objects that are visible to every eye.

Hence it is, that we have so many sects and parties amongst Christians.

Numbers having been severally taught particular systems, and having even been taught that their salvation is concerned in receiving the scriptures as containing those systems, have recourse to the scriptures, not to learn what these teach, but solely to torture them into a confirmation of their own sentiments. And thus they continue dividing and wrangling about the Shibboleth of a party, and deviate all possible ways from the truth, instead of harmoniously uniting in asserting their Christian liberty; in promoting piety and mutual forbearance; and in cultivating the universal love of God and man.

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It is owing to prejudice, also, that the sceptic is frequently confirmed in his infidelity, even by reading the scriptures.

Because he sits down to read them, not to make a fair trial, whether they be the will of God or not, but to collect arguments to convince him that they are not; the evidence of truth, therefore, leaves no impression upon his mind.

He pays no attention to the sublimity of the language; the energy of the sentiments; the purity, reasonableness, and perfection of the doctrines; or the demonstration of the spirit with power by which they are confirmed: for all these things are contrary to the point at which he aims.

He fixes upon some figurative passage, and insists that it should be literally understood; and, therefore, represents it as absurd, and, consequently, as destitute of any foundation in truth. And thus he vainly triumphs in his own weakness, whilst he dogmatically rejects, without the shadow of argument, what he would allow to be

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fair and rational in any other writings besides these.

Or if he do not descend so low as to carp at different representations of indifferent things, or to controvert facts by starting difficulties about circumstantial, or to substitute, in the room of sacred truth, some mistranslations, or mutilated passages, or accidental additions of transcribers to the text; he will, however, fix upon some particular historical passages of the same transaction, and because one historian only mentions the principal persons concerned in this transaction, and another mentions besides these all the persons present; it will be pretended, therefore, that contradictions are discovered, and that no credit is due to either of the historians. And hence occasion is taken to dispute, and explode those facts, which are related to us in the same words, and with exactly all the same circumstances.

But, whilst the sacred writings receive this treatment from him, the same sceptic will admit, every day, similar accounts of things,

things, from different authors of intelligence, without granting, or even dreaming, that the charge of falsehood should be fixed upon either.

If he should read, for instance, in one Greek historian, that Homer wrote the Iliad, and, in another, that Homer wrote the Odyssey ; or, should he read in one historian, that Alexander entered Asia, at a particular time, but, in another, that Alexander at the head of a great army entered Asia at that time, he could easily reconcile all these relations, and could not but admit that all the writers spake truth. Or, if he read in one Roman historian, that Brutus and Cassius conspired against Julius Cæsar, but, in another, that Brutus and Cassius, and above sixty senators, conspired against Cæsar, and killed him in the senate-house at Rome ; he would readily allow that the first historian confined his attention to the principal conspirators, whilst the other, without meaning any contradiction, introduced the whole party concerned ; and he would

would not think of imputing to either of them the least falsehood or inconsistency.

But that which the sceptic will admit to be right and justifiable, in all other writings, and upon all other occasions, he will deride and carp at in the scriptures. And the reason, we see, is, as appears from the instances now produced, not because the scriptures are liable to the objections he urges against them, but because he is under the power of prejudice, which disposes him to find fault, and leads him to find difficulties in the plainest truths ; to invert the order of things ; to involve in darkness the obvious dictates of common sense ; and to prevent the glory of God, by the appearance of Jesus Christ, from shining into our hearts.

But, again, as already hinted, it is owing to prejudice that Christians hold such contradictory sentiments, concerning the peculiar doctrines of the scriptures ; that the most palpably jarring and diametrically opposite systems, have been, at different times, not only by particular churches, but by particular

particular individuals of the same church, pretended to be deduced from them ; and that what one party has confidently presumed to prove, another party has as confidently presumed to confute from the same scriptures.

The scriptures themselves, when fairly examined, will not be found to contain contradictory doctrines. But it is impossible so to express any thing in any particular language, as to put it out of the power of prejudice, to pervert and misunderstand it. And what we are willing to find, and positive that we can find, we shall easily be persuaded we have found, when we meet with any thing, which, in sound, or at a distance, looks at all like it.

When, therefore, one party supposes, before hand, that such particular doctrines must be true, and another party supposes that the quite contrary doctrines must be true; and both apply to the scriptures, not so much to examine what they declare, as severally to confirm their own peculiar notions ; it is no wonder that those of each

party

party fancy they have discovered something, from which, they think, they may conclude, what they determined to conclude at first, namely, that the scriptures were on their side of the argument : for, with such persons, suppositions will pass for proofs, and the most positive evidence in favour of any doctrine will be received as a proof of the contrary. In short, the crooked will be straight, and the straight will be crooked ; a parable will be read as a history, and a history as a parable ; the plainest precept will be understood ironically, and the most figurative language explained literally.

To search the scriptures, then, to any purpose, we must suppose nothing beforehand, but apply to them for information, to be led to the knowledge and practice of every duty. Or, as the apostle Peter says,
“ As new-born babes, we should desire
“ the sincere milk of the word, that we
“ may grow thereby.”

New-born babes have no prejudices, but are ready to receive knowledge, just as it is proposed to them, without being thwarted

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or baffled in their enquiries, by any pre-conceived opinions. And exactly with the same dispositions, should we endeavour to come to the scriptures, to derive any profitable or advantageous instruction from our perusal of them.

All other knowledge, which concerns us as pilgrims and sojourners here, unless it be transcribed from these, we should consider as depending on conjectures, or founded on political views ; or, at best, as fallible, and liable to be blended with a mixture of error and imposture.

But the pure truths of God are perfect and sufficient, and can receive no light, nor strength, nor efficacy, from any human systems and decrees.

When we come to study these, therefore, we should study them as they are in themselves; consider them as they lye before us in their native simplicity; allow them always to explain themselves, and bring ourselves to admit that sense of their several doctrines which we would naturally admit, had we no where else any account of these

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doctrines, but that genuine unadulterated account which they give us.

And, thus, should we all shortly come, in the unity of the faith, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. For there could be but little room for any disputes about the general sense of scripture, were we not previously bewildered, by a blind attachment to certain systems of opinions, which have been falsely imposed upon the world, as containing, in the sense of the imposers, the very essence of scripture, if not something much more infallible, and efficaciously enlightening.

Indeed, if we could once rise above the servility of prejudice; lay aside all those standards of human pride and presumption which have been erected to determine the sense of the word of God; and be prevailed upon to search for the sense of scripture in the scriptures only; there would soon be an end of most of those controversies which have distracted the Christian world.

No questions could, then, be started about a Triune Being; about birth sin; about

about irresistible grace; or an infinite satisfaction; about purgatory; saint worship; and transubstantiation; because no such tenets are any where mentioned in the scriptures.

Nor could any doubt arise, concerning the infinite goodness and mercy of God; his adorable love in our redemption; or that repentance from dead works, and holy conversation and godliness which are universally required of men, because almost the whole scriptures are taken up with the plainest declarations, and the most forcible recommendation of these doctrines.

And as to any other differences that might still subsist amongst us, concerning the meaning of some particular words, or phrases, or any inferior concerns, these would all soon be swallowed up, in that mutual forbearance, harmony and love, which are so clearly and repeatedly mentioned in the scriptures, as absolutely inseparable from the Christian life.

The apostle, therefore, said, “ If the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are

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“ lost;”

"lost ;" that is, to those that are lost through their own obstinate prejudices, or, "in whom the god of this world," or some other attachment quite opposite to the gospel, "hath blinded their eyes."

To the honest and good heart, who examines the scriptures as the only way of life, every thing, at least every thing of importance, will be quite easy ; and he will daily grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

But whilst we are under the influence of prejudice, or resolve to explain the scriptures according to some preconceived opinions of our own, or according to certain opinions of others, to whom we ascribe the honour of infallibility ; or, whilst we read the scriptures only to confirm some old doctrines, or to establish some new doctrines, that have suddenly started up in our own imaginations, we may be ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

It is, also, to be observed, that if we would search the scriptures to any purpose,

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we must examine them as they stand connected together ; we must throw off the bias of our passions ; and we must not have recourse to them as a subject of mere curiosity, nor for the sake of science only. But, for the illustration of these, and of other remaining particulars, I must refer you to the following discourses.

In the mean time we may learn from what has been said, why there are still so many wranglings, and angry debates amongst Christians ; so much want of charity, and such gross ignorance.

It is plain, that all those evils are either owing to their not searching the scriptures at all ; or to their reading them with prejudice ; or to their entering only into a very partial examination of them. For, could they be once prevailed upon to conquer their prejudices, and to examine the scriptures fairly, they must all soon walk in the light, and live together in the mutual intercourse of all the lovely affections, and of every kind, and friendly office.

We should, then, see and feel, that charity is the grand distinguishing feature of Christians.

Hence we should be taught to lay aside all wrath and malice.

We should again see, that the love of God and man, or that, to love God and keep his commandments, is the whole duty of man, and the true way to eternal life; and that this is the sum and substance of the scriptures from beginning to end.

Hence all divisions would instantly cease amongst us.

Making holiness our grand aim, and forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, we would strive together for the faith of the gospel, holding fast the word of truth, and strengthening and comforting one another, in running the race that is before us.

Hence, then, we should be persuaded, seriously to ask ourselves, Are we under the influence of any degree of prejudice? And, if we are, what a hateful enemy has the dominion over us?

Is there one for Paul, and one for Apol-
los?

Do we go to the scriptures to vindicate any doctrines of men?

Do we maintain any doctrines which are never once mentioned in the scriptures?

Do we believe any doctrines to be the doctrines of scripture, only because they have been taught us by some venerable names?

Or, do we make no other use of the scriptures, than to force them into a kind of agreement with some particular sentiments, which we have either imagined ourselves, or received from others ?

Then let us consider, that we compliment our own wisdom, or the wisdom of others, to the disparagement of the divine wisdom.

And let us again consider, if this be the case, what an insult we thus offer to the divine Majesty.

And let us learn, therefore, to rely upon the divine wisdom ; to have recourse to this

only as altogether sufficient for our salvation; and to trust wholly to it, as our alone infallible guide to eternal life.

May we always walk according to this rule!—May we always thus search the scriptures! Amen.

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D I S C O U R S E VII.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the scriptures.

[*Discourse the Fifth, on this Subject.]*

TO learn how, or in what manner, we shall search the scriptures to the best purpose, I proposed to shew, that we must search them without prejudice; that we must search them as they stand connected together; that we must not search them according to the bias of our passions; that we must not search them as a matter of curiosity, or for the sake of mere science; that we must not search them as if they were calculated for particular circumstances only; and that we must search them early and continually.

Having already shewn, in the preceding discourse, that we must lay aside all pre-

judice, if we would search the scriptures to our great advantage, I now proceed to observe, in the second place, that if we would make any progress in knowledge, by searching the scriptures, we must not form our opinion of them from the seeming tendency of particular, detached, unconnected passages thrown together; or that we must not study them in scraps, but according to the uniform tenor of them, and the relation of each particular passage to the whole context of which it is a part.

This is a piece of justice which is due to all writings whatever; and which is absolutely necessary to enable us to form any tolerable idea of the sense and spirit of any writings.

For who can judge of an history from an accidental extract from it; or of a lesson of morality, from an imperfect select sentence, or half-sentence, that may happen to be quoted from it?

We must become acquainted with the general views of every author, and the principal point he aims at, to be able to under-

understand him in particular places: and this object can be accomplished only by reading the whole that he has written.

We must not, therefore, single out one text from one place, and another text from another place, either to acquire any clear sentiments of the grand design of the whole scriptures, or of the particular design of either of those texts which we may have selected. But to form a right judgment of the whole, we must read the whole: and to form a right judgment of any particular passage, we must carefully observe what gave occasion to it; to what persons it is addressed; and how it stands connected with what goes before and follows after.

If, likewise, we would have a right apprehension of any particular character, we must view the whole of it at once.

The same direction must be observed, if we would understand any of those divine exhortations that we meet with in the scriptures.

In short, when any part of a subject occurs of which we would form a right judgment,

ment, it is necessary to read the whole relating to this subject.

If we should touch, for instance, upon the destruction of the antediluvian world, or upon the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah afterwards; to be able to form clear sentiments of the divine justice, in those tremendous effects of Almighty power, we should read the preceding history of the people so destroyed, and observe all the reasons why the judgments of God were upon them.

Again, if we would endeavour to understand any one of our Lord's parables, it will not be sufficient to read a part of the parable, but we must read the whole at once, and likewise enquire into the occasion upon which it was introduced, and also into the characters of those to whom it was addressed.

And, in particular, with respect to the epistles of the apostles, as each of these had some special point in view, in order to form a right judgment of any part of each epistle, the whole, as Mr. Locke justly

justly observed, should be read through at once.

The epistles, as the same admirable author has observed, were letters addressed to particular churches in particular circumstances: and as we cannot comprehend the meaning of any common letter, by reading only a line, or sentence, at a time, and taking several months to read through the whole; neither can we, by pursuing the same method, comprehend the force and spirit of those sacred letters, or indeed of any part of them.

But to be sensible of the necessity of attending to the connexion which every particular passage of scripture may have with what goes before, and follows after, some examples will probably furnish the most evincing evidence.

If, in the first place, then, we should quote these words of scripture, detached from their connexion with the context, *There is no God*, we should thus strain the scriptures to express an Atheistical language: but when we observe the connexion they have

have with what goes before, we find that the words only contain the stupid assertion of a fool; and that, as it was a fool who said there was no God, the whole passage, therefore, teaches us the folly of atheism.

Again, by a detached arbitrary quotation from the scriptures, we might represent them as declaring that Jesus Christ was Antichrist. For we might quote them in this manner: ‘Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver, and an Antichrist.’ But the whole passage runs thus: ‘Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an Antichrist.’ *This* means, *whoever* of these who were already mentioned; and the whole passage, therefore, teaches, that they are deceivers and Antichrists, who deny that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.

Again, when we read, in the sixth chapter of Genesis, that ‘the imaginations of the thoughts of men’s hearts were only evil, and that continually,’ we are not hastily

hastily to conclude that this was intended to be descriptive of every man in the world; for we learn, a few verses after, that Noah was a righteous man, and perfect in his generation. And we learn from the whole history, that all those persons, the thoughts of whose hearts were only evil, and that continually, were destroyed for their great wickedness; but, on the contrary, that because Noah was a totally opposite character, he was, for this very reason, saved from the general destruction.

Again, in forming our ideas of any particular character, we must not determine the whole character from any of its parts; nor merely from the examination of any particular feature, presume to give the character entire. For who, for example, could form any just idea of the character of David, by either hearing that he was the *man after God's own heart*, or the man whom God had chosen to be king; or by hearing, on the other hand, of his conduct towards Uriah?

By searching the scriptures fairly, we shall learn, that David was neither a spotless, nor yet an altogether diabolical, but a very eccentric, mixed character: at one time very humble and pious; at another time revengeful and boisterous; and, upon the whole, distinguishable both for his great virtues, and for his great vices.

Again, when we are taught that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Saviour, we are not hence to conclude, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not, likewise, originally and supremely our Saviour; for, by following our enquiries, we shall find that our Lord Jesus Christ did nothing of himself, but that all he did was by the power and authority of the Father; that it was by the direction and good pleasure of the Father that the great salvation was revealed, which was graciously communicated to us by Jesus Christ; and that it was a faithful and universal obedience to all the Father's commandments, in accomplishing the great work of our redemption, which, according to the Father's appointment,

ment, has eventually constituted the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour: or, in other words, that it is God, the fountain of all mercy, grace, and love, who saveth us by Jesus Christ.

Again, when we, likewise, learn that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, we must egregiously mistake the case, if we infer from this that he came into the world to save those sinners, who presumptuously continue in their sins. For a farther acquaintance with the scriptures will inform us, that Jesus Christ also came to call sinners to repentance; to redeem us from all iniquity; to purify to himself a peculiar, or excellent people, zealous of good works; and that we must, therefore, endeavour to be pure and holy, or to walk even as he walked, to have any part in that great salvation which he has proposed to us. Though it be true, therefore, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, yet we see, that the only meaning of this declaration is, that he came to turn sinners from dead works to serve the living God,

God, that they might thus become qualified for, and therefore assuredly obtain the inheritance of the saints in light.

Again, if we return to the examination of historical passages, and examine the history of Lot and of his two daughters, and remember that they were rescued from the destruction which befel the other inhabitants of Sodom, we are not to conclude that they were altogether righteous, because of this circumstance. For Lot, before he left Sodom, offered to do a thing which was very reproachful to him; and rather than having done which, he ought to have been willing to have suffered any kind of death. And both he and his daughters afterwards were guilty of what was very shameful and abominable. Their whole history, therefore, fairly examined, will lead us to observe, that their righteousness was very far from being perfect; and that they were to be considered as righteous only in contradistinction to the horrid abomination of the Sodomites, though in other respects they were found transgressors.

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And hence we may learn, that the righteousness of some of the personages of the Old Testament, sometimes signifies no more than that they were not guilty of the crimes which others committed, to whom they are held up as a contrast.

Again, when we consider the character of Abraham, though upon the whole it was most excellent, considering the age of the world in which he lived, yet we are not to suppose it absolutely spotless, contrary to positive evidence. For though he was conspicuously obedient to the divine laws, after he became acquainted with them, and went and sojourned in a strange land, not knowing whither he went, yet he was not always a worshipper of the true God, but was originally an idolater. And though he afterwards displayed such great faith in God, as justly entitled him, all circumstances considered, to the appellation of the Father of the faithful, we are not yet to suppose, that his faith never failed him in any particular instance. In the affair of Hagar, he seems so far to have

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distrusted the divine promise, as to suppose that it could not be accomplished in any other way. And his faith peculiarly failed him when he meanly denied his wife, and hazarded, by this denial, the most shocking consequences; consequences which he should have much more dreaded than the loss of life.

Whilst we, therefore, justly admire his faith; admire it as unspeakably greater than that of any of his contemporaries, and as astonishingly displayed in his readiness to sacrifice his son, we should not forget that it was not always quite uniform: and we ourselves, therefore, should watch and pray against temptation.

Again, if we examine the history of Jacob: though his posterity were chosen to inherit the promise made to Abraham and Isaac, and the posterity of Esau were excluded from having any part in it; and though the promise made to Abraham and Isaac were repeated to Jacob, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, yet we cannot help observing many

many dark shades in his character. The churlish part which he acted towards his brother, when he was faint with hunger ; the price which he demanded and obtained for a mess of pottage, which he should have been willing to have purchased for him ; and the repeated falsehoods with which he imposed upon his father, not to descend to other particulars, are far from representing him to us in a favourable light.

Even the illustrious Joseph, who surmounted the most trying temptation, at the expence of his liberty, and of all his apparent worldly interests ; who preferred all the horrors of a prison to the violation of his duty ; whose magnanimity and generosity were so conspicuous to his brethren, who had sought his life, and sold him into slavery ; who, on account of his singular virtues, most signally prospered under the divine protection ; and who, in every respect, stands high amongst the greatest characters of antiquity, was, notwithstanding, chargeable with some things which he ought not to have done.

Though his brethren deserved no favour at his hand, yet he should not, to mortify and punish them, nor even to have discovered their present temper, have departed from the truth, and accused them with being spies, when he was fully persuaded that they were not.

He should not have assumed the character of a heathen, and sworn by the life of Pharaoh, contrary to that high allegiance which he owed to God, and from which no circumstance should have diverted him.

He should not have punished his innocent brother Benjamin, in common with his other brethren, by charging him with a theft of which he was not guilty, and threatening to reduce him to a state of bondage.

Nor should he have taken that advantage of the necessities of the people of Egypt, which the opportunity afforded him to involve them in oppression and slavery; and thus to do that which probably laid the foundation of the slavery of his own nation afterwards.

Pharaoh

Pharaoh was too powerful before, as is evident from the story of the butler and the baker, as well as from other circumstances. And though Joseph owed him much gratitude for raising him to great honor, and riches, and power; yet this gratitude would have been most fully and laudably manifested, by his endeavours to impress the king with sentiments of humanity, generosity, and benevolence, instead of arming him with a tremendous power, which placed his subjects in the situation of beasts of burthen.

He should have said—‘ Pharaoh, you have now a golden opportunity of being enthroned in the hearts of your people; of displaying your magnanimity, and of compelling all your subjects to love you as their father. There is corn enough in Egypt to supply all their wants. Let it be distributed freely. Or, at least, let them have it for the price which was formerly received for it.’

But instead of acting in this manner, Joseph first purchased all the people’s cattle,

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then all their lands, and then their persons, And though he afterwards restored their seed to sow the lands, and allowed them four-fifths of their produce, yet the lands continued Pharaoh's, and the people were dispossessed of their property, and degraded to a state of vassalage.

We see, therefore, that even Joseph was not, in all respects, a perfect character ; and, therefore, that we should take into consideration his entire character, his few failings as well as his many and great virtues, to form a right estimate of what he was.

And thus we should examine all the other characters that are described to us in the scriptures. For, otherwise, we may account their faults a sort of sanction to us ; and by giving into their weaknesses, far exceed them in transgressions, whilst we fall greatly below them in their peculiar virtues.

And, to this purpose, we should remember that the failings of great men are recorded in the scriptures, not to lead us to indulge in the same failings, but, on the contrary,

contrary, to guard us against them ; and to teach us, instead of falling by the same temptations, to learn from their miscarriage to exert a greater vigilance and circumspection, and to rise to greater purity of heart and life. We, therefore, find, that in the scriptures, no vice of any kind is ever justified in any character : and, hence, we should be taught not to justify ; and, much more, not to copy any vice in any character. The apostles themselves did not conceal, or palliate their imperfections ; nor authorise us to conceal or palliate them.

We should also remember, that the imperfections attending some extraordinary characters under the Old Testament dispensation, afford no sanction to Christians to run into the same imperfections. For we enjoy an incomparably greater light, and we have a perfect example proposed to our imitation, which we should humbly and earnestly copy ; whilst we regard the failings of the best men before the gospel dispensation, as so many mementos to us, shewing what the best amongst

us must still have been, if we had not been favoured with the all-efficacious light of the gospel.

I might have considered the characters of Moses, Job, and many others; and have gone almost through the whole scriptures, in examining doctrinal passages to illustrate the point before us: or to shew that we can never fully understand the scriptures, without considering them as they stand connected together; and endeavouring to comprehend the whole that is delivered upon every character, and upon every doctrine.

But the examples which I have just produced will be sufficient, I apprehend, to convince us, what strange work we should make with the scriptures, unless we were to study every subject in entire connexion with all its parts.

Indeed, by collecting particular passages, or separate mangled sentences; fixing upon these an arbitrary sense of our own, and reasoning and concluding from them, without considering what goes before, or follows after; we may make out almost any doctrine

doctrine from the scriptures, and pervert the positive and obvious meaning of any books that were ever written.

Hence it is, that faith has so often triumphed over charity ; that an odium has been cast upon good works ; and that the greatest barbarities that ever disgraced the human kind, have been pretended to be authorised by the scriptures.

Hence, also, characters approved, upon the whole, have been made a standard in every particular case ; and men have allowed themselves to commit vices that are always condemned, because some illustrious men of old had been unhappily surprised into them. Thus, because Jacob had been guilty of some unwarrantable practices, pretended Christians have thought themselves justified in copying him deliberately in these practices : not considering that the example of Jacob can justify nothing that is wrong ; that they are furnished with a greater light than he possessed ; and that they are expressly forbidden some practices against which Jacob had no positive law.

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But whilst we carefully compare one part of scripture with another, we may always see our way clear before us: at least, we can never fall into any mistakes that are repugnant to holiness, but must continually advance in the knowledge of the truth; whilst the truth shall make us free from the servitude of sin, enlighten our understandings, and purify and refresh our hearts.

I shall only once more observe, under this head, what I wish to recommend as a rule of great importance, that when the general tenor of scripture is decisive concerning any particular doctrine, this is to be appealed to as our standard for determining the sense of any select passages, which may at first sight appear to have a different aspect. As the same fountain sendeth not forth sweet water and bitter, what Moses and the prophets, what Christ and the apostles clearly and harmoniously proclaim in a thousand texts, they must be supposed to proclaim universally. We should never enter into the supposition, that a few obscure texts may contradict the thousand,

thousand, nor explain the thousand by them, but explain them by the thousand; assured, that if they be really parts of scripture, they must contain precisely the same doctrine.

According to this rule, the divine unity will be fully and irreversibly established. For the unequivocal language of the whole scriptures is, that there is only one God, one creator, one unchangeable and everlasting sovereign, who has no equal, peer, or competitor; who is the God and Father of all, and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; who, therefore, could not be born, could not die, could not grow in wisdom and stature, could not be weary, nor hungry, nor thirsty; could not suffer pain, nor anguish, nor sorrow; could not bow before the throne of another, nor be indebted to another for all his wisdom, and power, and strength; nor be compounded of different persons or of different beings. Surely, then, this universal language is not to be overthrown by one spurious text, 1 John v. 7. and three or four mistranslated texts;

texts ; which very texts, as they stand, are far from expressing the doctrine for which they are adduced. And, according to this rule, we shall acquire the clearest views of the terms of our acceptance with God ; of his great love in reconciling us to himself ; and of all the important leading doctrines of scripture.

But to accomplish the object proposed to us by the requisition in the text, it will be farther necessary, that we search the scriptures, not according to the bias of our passions ; nor out of curiosity as a matter of mere science ; nor as if they were calculated for particular circumstances only ; but as the source of our greatest comfort, and richest treasure in all circumstances.

The mist of passion is as great an obstruction to our progress in knowledge, as the worst kind of prejudice ; and is, indeed, one of the principal feeding springs of prejudice itself. Mere knowledge, also, unless our practice be correspondent with it, can be of no real use to us. And, unless we perceive the importance of the scrip-

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scriptures to us in all circumstances, we shall be apt to neglect them entirely ; or shall reap but little advantage from them, when we accidentally make them a part of our study. But I shall again resume the discussion of these particulars, upon which we have not sufficient time to enlarge at present.

Let us be taught, in the mean time, if we have hitherto made only a partial examination of the scriptures, or formed our judgment of the whole only from the sound of particular passages, to pursue, for the future, a very different conduct ; and most carefully and attentively to compare one part with another.

Thus we shall clearly discern the spirit of the whole, and of all its parts ; and continually encrease in divine knowledge.

And thus, the more we read the word of God, the more shall we perceive that it was planned by infinite wisdom ; and that in this, as in all his works, he is the God of order, harmony, and love.

D I S.

DISCOURSE VIII.

JOHN V. 39.

Search the Scriptures.

[*Discourse the Sixth on this subject.*]

AFTER considering our obligations to search the scriptures, I proposed to point out the best methods to be observed in order to search them to our profit and advantage.

To this purpose I first noticed, that we must lay aside all prejudices, or preconceived opinions concerning them ; and, secondly, that we should not form our sentiments of them, from the seeming tendency of particular detached, unconnected passages ; nor study them in scraps, nor in half sentences, but as they stand connected together.

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I now proceed to observe, in the third place, that we must search the scriptures, not according to the bias of our passions, but with an ingenuous disposition of mind ; endeavouring to be as willing to discover and relinquish our own failings, as to receive fresh light and strength, towards establishing us in upright sentiments and practices.

It needs scarcely be observed, that we are all, without the utmost caution, liable to a variety of deceptions, and apt to indulge a precipitate confidence in our own judgment, in many cases, where we are palpably wrong.

Each of us may observe, in some of our acquaintance, an obstinate perseverance in particular practices, which are so plainly reproachful to them, as, we think, must constantly strike themselves with the most forcible conviction : and yet we may find these persons not at all ashamed of their conduct, but ready to vindicate it upon every occasion ; and ready, perhaps, to condemn those

those who run not with them into the same excess of folly.

When any such instances occur, each of us should put these serious questions to himself: May not I, likewise, whilst I cherish an overweening conceit of myself, be under the same blindfold delusion in some respects, in which those, whom I condemn, appear to me to be under in other respects? And, May there not be in me some sins which I am, at present, far from esteeming such, and to which I am particularly attached, for no other reason than this, that *they most easily beset me*? And the conclusion arising from these reflections ought to be, Let me examine all my own practices one by one, and see whether there be not some of these, which I now pursue and vindicate, which I would as warmly oppose, were it not for that strong affection which I have contracted for myself, through a perversely indulged habit and inclination?

Passion, which is the principal foundation of prejudice, disorders the whole intel-

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lectual frame, and must, therefore, necessarily mislead and deceive us.

The apostle Peter, therefore, informs us, that before we can receive any benefit from the word of truth, we must lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings.

The man who is determined upon malicious practices, will never, it is evident, pay any regard to those lessons of love which are inculcated in the scriptures. Neither will that honesty, sincerity, disinterested joy in another's welfare, and that precept to render to all their dues, which are so forcibly recommended to us in the scriptures, have any influence upon the mind, which is previously resolved to practise the arts of deceit and hypocrisy, and envy and malice.

In like manner, he who makes money the first object of his pursuits, and is fixed in his purpose to hold it fast, will never be taught liberality from the scriptures.

Nor can he, again, who is predisposed, at all events, to gratify any of his inordinate

nate lusts, be ever persuaded from the scriptures, to live soberly, righteously, and godly.

Indeed, such a one is absolutely incapable of discerning the ugly features of his own character.

Because he is *self-willed*, he is, therefore, out of the reach of all conviction.

Because he delights in his iniquity, all its malignant qualities are concealed from his view; and he either will not hear, or but slightly regard, any motives that can be urged against him.

In short, any shuffling excuse will satisfy him.

Because he is frail, and, therefore, liable to involuntary errors, he will, hence, reconcile himself to known enormous transgressions. And if, at the same time, he shews a just abhorrence of other vices, to which he has no temptation, nor any particular propensity, his heart will be at ease; and he will flatter himself that he is acceptable to God, and that he should be so to his fellow-creatures.

This circumstance is most strikingly represented in the character of David, king of Israel.

His heart smote him, when he cut off the skirt of Saul's garment; though Saul, at the same time, hunted him for his life.

Who, then, could have ever suspected such a one of brutal violence against unoffending innocence?

Who could have supposed him capable of laying a scheme to take away the life of a faithful servant?

But David, we again find, discovered the utmost indignation, and the most implacable resentment, against the supposed plunderer of a poor man, who robbed him of his own ewe lamb.

Yet the same David was guilty of a more aggravated instance of oppression and violence; was guilty of the complicated crimes of murder and adultery, without appearing to feel any great remorse.

In the one case, we see, he had no passion to bias him; in the other case, he was blinded and rendered insensible by the whirlwind

wind of his passion. And it would appear from the parabolical address to him upon this occasion, that, had the prophet directly accused him of real crimes, he might, great as they were, have made light of all his remonstrances. Nay, he was possibly capable, at this time, of reading a pathetic lecture to others against his own crimes, without bringing the charge home to himself. Or, if he thought of his own particular case, he might have invented such a number of alleviating circumstances, as would, in his opinion, have almost entirely exculpated him.

Hence, then, we should be taught to consider the dreadful effects of being under the delusion of passion ; and how useless any instructions must be to us, whilst we are subject to its tyrannical influence.

And totally to subdue all our passions, and to enable us to read the scriptures with candour and impartiality, and a full scrutiny into our own hearts, we should consider that nothing is the less criminal in itself, because we are the persons guilty of it ;

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that what is criminal in one, is equally criminal in all who are exactly in the same circumstances of light and knowledge; and that neither our inclinations nor our interests can alter the nature of lying, extortion, debauchery and injustice, or of any other vice.

In short, because we may be, at present, reconciled to particular practices, or averse to particular duties, or strongly convinced of the truth of particular opinions, we should not, therefore, pronounce such practices innocent, nor such duties unreasonable, nor such opinions uncontestable. Much less should we, upon this presumption, either search the scriptures to endeavour to persuade ourselves that they do not forbid such practices; or to explode, or find fault with them where they do; or to be confirmed in the belief that they excuse our compliance with such duties, or that they justify such particular opinions; but we should first seriously, coolly, and impartially consider, what the scriptures themselves say, after we have

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carefully compared one part with another, and then candidly appeal to our own hearts : Are not all those opinions which they teach, in perfect consistency with the wisdom of God ? And are not all those duties which they inculcate, altogether worthy of him to require ; and every way becoming man to perform ? And is it not essential to our true dignity and happiness, to walk exactly according to that pattern, which they hold up to view as the standard of our imitation ?

In this manner we should soon see the beauty, perfection and excellence, of every line of that wisdom which descended from above ; and whilst we perceived by a happy experience, that our understandings were enlightened, we should gradually find that all our lusts were mortified and subdued. I repeat the sentiment, that if we would first deliberately search the scriptures, to observe what doctrines they clearly reveal, and then seriously appeal to our own hearts, Are not such doctrines reasonable and every way worthy of us ? There is

not a single vice which they condemn which we would not also condemn ; nor a single virtue which they enforce which we would not also approve.

But passion, like a tempest at sea, will carry us out of the way that we should go ; will cast us headlong when we expect to move on steadily ; and, whether we will or not, will roll its billows over us : and, if it increase or continue, will frustrate all our endeavours to resist it, and, at last, leave us a melancholy wreck on the shore of destruction.

This observation might be illustrated at large, by examining various passages of scripture, and considering the various senses which different men of opposite opinions have put upon them ; and by again considering the uniform and obvious sense, which all sober, impartial, and dispassionate persons would naturally put upon them.

But without enlarging upon this head, I shall now proceed to shew, in the next place, that “ to build ourselves up firmly “ in our most holy faith, we should, also, “ learn,

" learn, not to search the scriptures as a
" matter of curiosity, or for the sake of
" mere science." For if we search them
only with this view, or just to obtain the in-
significant honour of being able disputants,
or the paltry triumph of quibbling sophists,
we might as well have been engaged in ma-
thematical problems, or in arithmetical cal-
culations, or in any other speculative in-
vestigations whatever.

We need only consider in proof of this,
the grand original design of the scriptures,
as the highly benevolent purpose of Al-
mighty God, in furnishing us with those
rich treasures which they contain.

And this was, we know, not to amuse,
but edify ; not to teach us philosophy, nor
to rack our thoughts with deep specula-
tions, but to teach us to know ourselves ;
not to make us expert in subtle distinctions
and concise and elegant reasonings, but to
make us ashamed of vice, to abhor it, and
fly from it ; nor to enlighten the under-
standing only, or communicate mere know-

ledge

ledge to men, but to reform, purify, and establish their hearts.

Mere knowledge puffeth up, genders pride, and other evil passions, and produceth envy and averfion.

But that knowledge which is reduced to practice ; which is applied to awaken and diffus: all the good affections ; to extricate the mind from the bondage of corruption ; and to produce in us the likeneſs of our great original ; is alone edifying and venerable, and should ever engage our earnest attention and pursuit.

We learn, accordingly, as I have particularly shewn in a former discourse, that the scriptures were given us to make us wise to salvation ; to give us such an amiable and endearing view of all the divine perfections as should lead us to love, adore and serve, our Almighty Sovereign, by the best precepts and the best examples ; to ennable and perfect our nature ; to emancipate us from every debasing folly and practice ; to remove our imperfections ; to rescue us from every corruption ; to elevate us to the posſession

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session of real greatness ; and to yield peace, and hope, and joy, and everlasting life, to our heaven-born souls.

We should, therefore, search the scriptures purely with this view. To this most important purpose, we should apply every particular doctrine that they offer to our consideration.

We should remember, that they are communicated by the Father of lights ; and we should gratefully regard them as that living bread which came down from heaven.

We should read them, therefore, to enliven and nourish our better part ; to immortalize those spirits which God has given us ; to awaken our consciences ; to impress the divine image upon our hearts ; to inspire us with patience and resignation to all the divine appointments ; to prepare ourselves to be always ready to appear before the awful tribunal of judgment on the last day ; and to constrain us to love one another even as Christ loved us ; that, as he

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now liveth, we may live also, and reign and triumph with him for ever.

At every repeated exhortation that we read or hear, or that at any time comes across our thoughts, we should ask ourselves, Is this exhortation suited to our circumstances? Does that vice belong to us, which it is calculated to heal? or, Are we destitute of that virtue which it authoritatively recommends?

And whilst on the one hand, we are charmed with the loveliness of truth; made to admire the grandeur and beautiful proportion of every principle of goodness; and shocked at the deformity, irregularity, and forbidding features of every species of iniquity; we should endeavour, on the other hand, to confirm every holy resolution and virtuous practice, by attentively surveying all the pleasures of religion, and by constantly calling to mind the threatenings denounced against all impenitent sinners, and all the divine promises to the righteous. Is this, or that threatening, we should say,

directly pointed against us ? Or, is this, or that promise, revealed in our favour ? And, as we continue our enquiries, we should be constantly searching our own hearts, that we may daily advance more and more to all that perfection which the scriptures require, and to which they so powerfully lead.

Thus the Lord said to Joshua, “ This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein continually, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written ; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”

Thus, we likewise find, that the Psalmist considered the word of the Lord, not as a matter of curiosity and amusement, or an object to entertain or employ the attention of speculative men, but as what aimed at infinitely higher purposes ; and what, therefore, should be always particularly applied to these purposes. He, therefore, says,

“ Thy

“ Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a
“ light unto my path.”

But how much greater still is the light which we enjoy in that additional revelation with which we have been favoured since the days of the Psalmist? And how much more earnestly should we apply it to the gracious purpose for which it was bestowed? We should take it up as the light from heaven, and say, “ Heavenly Father,
“ guide us by this light to heaven !”

We should resolve to be directed by it to that other glorious world, which it opens to our view.

We should regard all the things that belong to our peace.

We should lay aside every weight, and the sins that more easily beset us.

We should take Christ’s yoke upon us, and learn of him, and find rest to our souls.

The next observations, which I proposed to make were, that when we search the scriptures, we should consider them as applicable

plicable to us in all circumstances; we should endeavour to investigate the meaning of the more obscure passages by those that are plain and easy; we should be directed in our enquiries by those other lights which God has given us; we should distinguish between mere history, and that which comes under the denomination of revelation; and we should search them early and continually.

I had no thoughts, at first, of extending the subject to so great a length. But it is as copious as it is important. And, as we cannot well bestow too much pains upon it, I should hope that some farther observations will be read with patience and candor.

Let us learn, in the mean time, to lay our minds open to all the sacred impressions of truth; and let us pray for a dispassionate temper, for pious, heavenly affections, and for an universal attention to the things that belong to our peace; lest, when it might be expected, that we should be in the capacity

pacity of becoming teachers to others, we ourselves shall be found ignorant of the first principles of the oracles of God.

And may this supremely glorious Being, of his infinite mercy, do for us abundantly, above all that we are able to ask or think, through Jesus Christ our Lord !

DISCOURSE IX.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the scriptures.

[*Discourse the Seventh on this Subject.*]

IN endeavouring to shew in what manner we must search the scriptures, to derive the greatest advantage from them, I have already observed, that we must lay aside all prejudice, or preconceived opinions concerning them; that we must not form our sentiments of them from the seeming tendency of particular detached sentences, but study them as they stand connected together; that we must not be influenced by the bias of our passions; and that we must not search them as a matter of curiosity, or for the sake of mere science, but with a view to the growing improvement and felicity of our minds.

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I now proceed to observe, in the next place, that we must not search them as calculated for particular circumstances only, but as adapted for our benefit in all circumstances.

If we conceive of them as of use to those only, who labour under depressed circumstances; to soothe and feed them with better hopes, but not necessary to those who are surrounded with the blessings of friendship, ease, affluence, and power, we shall find them but a dull book.

We cannot be deeply interested in that which we persuade ourselves has no material relation to our own concerns; nor can we, therefore, feel the force of any of those consolations which such an object is suited to raise.

Neither, upon this supposition, when it comes to be our turn to be those persons for whose benefit we think the scriptures are properly adapted, can we derive from them that imagined relief and comfort with which we may have before absurdly flattered ourselves.

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The man who can reconcile himself to the study of the scriptures in the hour of adversity only, will then find them load him with the most stinging reproaches for his past inattention to them; and will then see, if he seriously consider them, that it has been owing to his neglect of them in his prosperity, that his present distress is so great as it is. For, had he previously delighted in the divine testimonies, and made them his counsellors, he would find the light of God's countenance shining upon him in the most overwhelming calamities. Therefore the Psalmist said, ‘Thy statutes have been my song in the days of my pilgrimage.’

Besides, it is a serious study of the scriptures which throws the greatest blessings into a scene of prosperity. They lift the soul to God as the author of every good and perfect gift. They impress us with the highest gratitude for all his blessings. They teach us humility and moderation; and so make us satisfied from ourselves. They form us to an acquiescence in the

divine good will and pleasure; and thus prepare us for all the succeeding changes of our being.

And, for these reasons, we see, that they are necessary to us at all times. With this view, therefore, we should apply to them continually, that we may never apply to them in vain; and that, when we mostly need those animating refreshments which they afford, we may find them flow upon us beyond our most enlarged expectations.

Thus shall we find them support us in the vale of adversity, as well as on the summit of riches; and in the dissolving struggles of death, as well as in the perfection of health and strength. And thus, whilst we think most honourably of the scriptures, shall we truly rejoice in those distinguishing privileges which they propose to all ranks and conditions of men; and esteeming them our best treasure, shall be rightly prepared for making that improvement of them which we ought to make.

Thus the poor will rejoice to find that the gospel is preached to them.

Thus

Thus the rich also will cheerfully submit to that humility to which they are called, in hope of the glory which shall hereafter be revealed.

Thus the wise as well as the unlearned, and the Jew as well as the Gentile, and all people of all nations, from the highest to the lowest, will perceive the propriety and energy of that appellation, which is given them by the apostle Paul; namely, ‘that
‘they are the grace of God, which hath
‘appeared bringing salvation unto all men,
‘teaching them that denying ungodliness
‘and worldly lusts, they should live soberly
‘and piously in this present world, look-
‘ing for the blessed hope, and the glorious
‘appearing of the great God, and of our
‘Saviour Jesus Christ.’

But whilst we injuriously consider them as a partial dispensation of God, that was never intended for universal benefit, or only designed to serve the interests of some individuals; arbitrarily to save a certain determinate number of the human species, and as arbitrarily to reprobate all the rest; what

joy can they, then, pour into their hearts? What sacred veneration can we, then, entertain for them? Can we, then, indeed, seriously esteem them the wisdom of God? Or, if we can, what debasing sentiments must we then form of his supreme Majesty? How infinitely must we dishonour and blaspheme his holy name? We cannot, in this case, rejoice in him as the Father of mercies. We cannot rejoice in him as gracious, accessible, and disposed to extend his rich salvation to all his creatures. We cannot look up to him with that grateful homage, and with that adoring complacency, as when we behold him calling all men every where to repent; instructing the wise as well as giving understanding to the simple; and revealing himself, without any exception, the infinite God of infinite love to every rational being under heaven.

To search the scriptures, then, to any purpose, or rightly to understand, heartily to embrace, seriously to apply, and truly to admire and love, those divine instructions which they contain, we should consider them,

DISCOURSE IX. 183

them, as indeed they are, not calculated for particular circumstances only, but for all circumstances; and as offering the best comforts, and the most invaluable treasures, peace and reconciliation, with God our Father, to all ranks and conditions of men. And every time we refer to them for instruction, admonition, and spiritual meditations, we should say to ourselves, ‘Here is a jewel of great price; our dearest companion in sickness and in health; the great gift of heaven, to guide us through all the travails of life; and our only infallible light to glory, and honour, and immortality.’

I would observe, in the next place, and this demands our greatest attention, that when we search the scriptures, ‘we should endeavour to investigate the meaning of the more difficult passages by those that are plain and easy.’

It would be truly astonishing if there were not some things hard to be understood in the scriptures.

Addresses, which had a relation to peculiar prevailing customs, and which came with a most awakening energy to persons acquainted with such customs, must necessarily become abstruse when those customs are disused or forgotten.

Besides, the variety of changes to which all languages are liable, and the different ideas which are successively annexed to different words, and to the same words in different ages, without a constant divine inspiration, must render many things obscure in all antient writings whatever.

But it is to be observed, that the difficulties which occur in the scriptures, are not without their use. They serve to awaken our attention ; to rouse us to consideration and enquiry ; to exercise the genius of the most wise and learned ; and therefore lead us to a more frequent intercourse with the sacred contents of the scriptures, than if the whole were so easy as to be perfectly understood by reading them over once or twice.

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But, here, it is again to be observed, that the beauty and excellency of the scriptures consist in this; that the way of salvation, which is there proposed to us, is perfectly intelligible to persons of the meanest capacity; indeed to all persons whatever, who are but a degree removed from a state of idiotism.

When we either recapitulate the perfections of the great Jehovah, or describe those terms of pardon and reconciliation which he here offereth to our acceptance, every one must understand what sentiments are intended to be conveyed. Every one must know what is meant by the terms, when we learn that there is only one true and living God; that he is the creator and preserver of all things; that he is the author of all our benefits and enjoyments; that he is good to all; that his tender mercies are over all his works; and that he is gracious, forbearing, and long-suffering to the children of men, and not willing that any should perish, but that all should come unto him and be saved.

Again,

Again, every one must know what is meant, when we are informed that sin is displeasing to the holy Majesty of heaven: and that, therefore, as we have all sinned, we should all forsake our sins, or repent, and be converted, that our sins may be blotted out.

Every one, also, must clearly perceive, what is meant by lying, swearing, covetousness, extortion, malice, pride, envy, deceit, contention, drunkenness, adultery, murder, and other works of darkness; and what is meant, when we are told that none who continue in the practice of these vices shall inherit the kingdom of heaven, but shall be punished with eternal death.

Nor can any one be a stranger to what is understood by humility, meekness, compassion, mercy, prayer, and praise to God, the doing to all others as we would that they should do to us, and the delighting in all the commandments of God.

Again, when we learn that God will turn unto us, if we turn unto him; that he will never leave us nor forsake us, if we sincerely

sincerely endeavour to obey him ; that he will not suffer his servants to be tempted above what they are able ; and that, if we love him, and keep his commandments, death will not put an end to our being, but that he, who raised up Christ from the dead, will, likewise, cause us to live beyond this world ; will make us to live for ever in the heavenly mansions : I say, when any of these declarations are proposed to us, the dullest understanding must clearly comprehend the force and spirit of them.

When this, then, is the case, when the way of life is obvious to all, and level to the very lowest capacity, what reason have we to complain of any of those difficulties which so frequently occur in the scriptures ?

Or, if we wish to surmount any of those difficulties, or to acquire any tolerable knowledge of them, what other rational method can we propose to ourselves than to compare and explain them, according to those passages, which are unquestionably plain and obvious ?

But

But it is preposterously absurd to explain what is clear, and what does not want explaining, by what is doubtful, and therefore uncertain ; or to explain, or rather to explain away, the simplest truths, by understanding literally a highly figurative passage, which, being literally understood, is a contradiction to our senses. This would be as ridiculous and absurd as to explain a living language by a dead one ; or as to pervert the sense of a language which we do understand, by interpreting it according to some random guesses of our own, concerning a language of which we are perfectly ignorant.

Yet such is the strange method which those Christians take, who attempt to explain, or to explain away, all the most plain and incontestable doctrines of scripture, by bringing them to the standard of an arbitrary sense, which they have affixed to some of the obscurest passages in the apostle Paul's epistles.

This is the more to be wondered at, as his brother Peter has expressly guarded us against

against such erroneous practices; having an eye at the same time to those very difficult passages of Paul's epistles.

Peter had been recommending to his fellow Christians, the most holy conversation and godliness, as the only stable foundation, which they could lay, of building themselves up into eternal life.

This, he likewise informs them, was the constant doctrine of the apostle Paul; though some had perversely explained him as meaning the contrary.

He, therefore, warns us, whenever we meet with any difficulties in Paul's epistles, that these are never to be understood to give any encouragement to the sinner.

' We,' says he, ' according to God's promise, look for a new heaven, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. ' Wherefore, beloved, seeing that we look ' for such things, be diligent, that ye may ' be found of him in peace, without spot, ' and blameless; and account, that the ' long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, ' even as our beloved Paul, also, according

' to

‘ to the wisdom given unto him, has written
‘ unto you ; as also, in all his epistles,
‘ speaking in them of these things, in
‘ which are some things hard to be under-
‘ stood, which they that are unlearned and
‘ unstable wrest, as they do also the other
‘ scriptures, unto their own destruction.
‘ Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing that ye
‘ know these things before, beware, lest ye
‘ also being led away with the error of the
‘ wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.
‘ But grow in grace, and in the know-
‘ ledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus
‘ Christ.’

Now here we may observe, that, whatever be the difficulties which occur in the apostle Paul’s writings, there are none of them to be so explained, as to lead us to believe, that God is not willing that all should be saved ; nor are any of them to be so explained, as to give countenance to those who continue in their sins ; but that we are to consider the whole of them, when rightly understood, as unitedly directing us to

to be without spot and blemish; to be prepared for our Lord at his coming.

We may again observe, that the *unstable*, who put a perverse construction upon the doctrines of the apostle Paul, are united with the *unlearned* by the apostle Peter, to shew us, that when they are willing to return again to their beloved lusts, it is not so much the fault of the understanding as the fault of the heart, which leads them to represent Paul as expressing a doctrine that is not according to godliness.

Besides, the apostle James has also guarded us against an immoral interpretation of what his brother apostle says concerning our being saved by faith; and shewn us, that in this he never intended that good works were to be excluded, as having no connexion with the faith of the gospel, by observing, in positive language, that no faith whatever, without good works, can procure any man the favour of God.

Hence, then, we should learn, that as holiness is the grand, obvious, and leading doctrine of the scriptures, every part of them

them consistently understood, must be in perfect harmony with this; that we should, therefore, cultivate the greatest acquaintance with all those passages, which most clearly and positively inculcate this; and that, whilst any passage seems to convey to us a contrary meaning, we remain in the dark concerning the meaning of the passage; and should either put a different construction upon it from what it, at first view, seems to bear; or, if we cannot thus render it intelligible, should assure ourselves that it is a mistranslation, or a corruption introduced by some ignorant transcriber.

It is obvious, as I have said, to the most cursory observer, that holiness is the grand leading doctrine of the scriptures: and, as this is that doctrine which is universally inculcated with the greatest solemnity and perspicuity, this, therefore, is to be our constant key to the meaning of every part of scripture.

Thus we shall be persuaded, that our being saved by faith, can never imply that we can be saved, according to the doctrines of

of the gospel, without walking according to the laws of the gospel.

Thus we shall perceive, that those passages which are most hard to be understood, can never, consistently with the whole, warrant us to indulge in the least violation of the divine laws.

Thus we shall clearly see, that to honor Christ is to honor the Father who sent him; and that to love Christ is to keep his commandments, as the grateful dependents, beneficiaries, and redeemed children of our Father; and, likewise, that all that Christ has done and suffered for us, is so far from encouraging us to continue in sin, that it is intended, on the contrary, to be the most powerful and effectual incentive to animate us, by a patient continuance in well doing, to lay hold on the crown of eternal life.

I might particularly illustrate this point, by a variety of instances, which would lead us to the obvious sense of many noble passages of scripture.

But, leaving you to make an application of what has been said to these purposes, I

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shall proceed, in another discourse upon this subject, to mention some remaining particulars, which must necessarily engage our attention, to prosecute, with success, the divine study which I have been recommending.

In the mean time, let us learn to explore the sense of the more difficult passages from those which are so plain, that none but the wilfully blind can misunderstand, or misapply them. And, as the great God has revealed himself, that we may grow up into his likeness, and be qualified for the joys of his heavenly kingdom, let us principally apply ourselves to this grand object; and labour, by an holy conversation, to obtain the divine favour, and all those unspeakably glorious rewards, which await every true and faithful servant.

DISCOURSE X.

JOHN v. 39.

Search the Scriptures.

[*Discourse the Eighth on this subject.*]

I First attempted, from these words, to point out our indispensable obligations to observe the direction which they contain. These obligations, then, being once established, we should, hence, be naturally disposed to attend to the proper methods to be pursued in searching the scriptures to our great advantage.

And, to this purpose, I observed, that we should, first, lay aside all prejudice, or pre-conceived opinions concerning them. Secondly, that we should not deduce our sentiments concerning them, from the seeming tendency of particular detached passages, or half-sentences, but study them

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as they stand connected together. Thirdly, that we should not search according to the bias of our passions, but with an ingenuous disposition of mind, being as willing to discover and relinquish our own failings, as to receive fresh light and strength towards confirming ourselves in upright principles and practices. Fourthly, that we should not search the scriptures as a matter of curiosity, or for the sake of mere science. Fifthly, that we should not search them as if they were calculated for particular circumstances only, but for all circumstances. And, once more, that we should endeavour to investigate the meaning of the more difficult passages, by those that are plain and easy.

These particulars having been already explained, in as brief and intelligible a manner as I was able, I now proceed to observe, in the next place, that we should, also, in searching the scriptures, be directed by those other lights which God has given us.

Contradictions, it is most evident, can never proceed from the God of all wisdom
and

and truth, and light and knowledge. As the same fountain cannot send forth sweet water and bitter, much less can the only perfect Being in the universe deny himself.

But conscience, we should remember, is the gift of God.

He, therefore, can have given us no other laws, which oblige us to violate the express declarations of conscience.

He can never command us, by a different authority, to put what we think darkness for light, or what we think light for darkness ; or to worship him in a manner that is repugnant to the clear dictates of conscience.

Reason, also, is the gift of God : it is that primary light of heaven, which he hath given to be the light of every man in the world.

He, therefore, can never require us by any revelation, to believe things which are diametrically opposite to reason. He can never require us to believe that one being is another being ; that he who is greater than another, is only equal to another ; that

he who did nothing of himself, did all things of himself ; that he who sent another being, is that other being whom he sent ; or that there is no difference between three and one, or between one and three. Nor can he ever require us to believe, that bread is flesh, or that wine is blood ; or that a living being held himself dead in his own hands, and put himself dead into his own mouth ; nor that the same individual body is wholly taken by millions of persons at the same time, and that each of these persons has a whole body to himself, whilst there is but one body broken and entire for them all. Neither can he require us to believe, that holiness is necessary to our salvation, and at the same time of no importance to us, but to be rather estimated as filthy rags, forbidding and odious.

The scriptures were never intended to hoodwink or silence our consciences, but to awaken and enlighten them ; nor to oppose or render our reason useless, but to direct and strengthen it,

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We should not endeavour, therefore, to stifle conscience and reason, when we are searching the scriptures; nor suppose that the language of the one is contrary to that of the other; but should examine the scriptures by our reason, and judge by our reason what they say. Thus the apostle Paul says, ‘ Prove all things;’ he means by reason, that Gift of God that is born with us:—‘ and hold fast that which is good;’ namely, that which, to our impartial reason, appears to be so. And it is only by following his advice that we can acquire any tolerable and consistent knowledge of the scriptures. Nay, it is reason alone which can satisfy us that God is their author. But the farther we advance in our researches into them, by the assistance of this luminous guide, the more shall we see, and know, that they are the wisdom of God, and the power of God. In our progress, every doctrine will still more forcibly approve itself to our unprejudiced reason: and we shall find no practice forbidden there, which our reason does not also forbid; nor

any practice authorized there, which our reason does not also authorize and applaud.

The apostle, therefore, says, ‘ The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit ! ’

Reason and scripture, therefore, should always go hand in hand in our enquiries after truth, that we may know the truth, and that the truth may make us free.

But if we once renounce our reason, we give up ourselves an easy prey to all imposture and wickedness ; and may have our minds so darkened, as even under the imaginary sanction of scripture, to blaspheme the most obvious and important doctrine of scripture, and to turn the whole into scorn and ridicule. But without saying any more upon this head,

I shall briefly observe, in the next place, that we should distinguish between the historical and genealogical parts of scripture, and those which immediately relate to our conduct, and which were graciously revealed for our benefit and salvation.

All scripture that is given by inspiration, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction,

correction, for instruction in righteousness.

But we need not suppose, that the history of journeys, famines, wars, marriages, and genealogies, were given us by inspiration; because the writers, either from their own knowledge, or from the narratives of others, were sufficiently qualified to furnish such histories, without any supernatural knowledge.

Besides, as all scripture which is given by inspiration is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, &c. it hence follows, that those parts which convey no instruction of any kind, in which neither virtue nor vice, nor the supreme Governor of the world, nor a future state of rewards and punishments, are mentioned, such as the book of Esther, and the Song of Solomon, can have no claim to inspiration. Besides, also, in the historical parts of scripture, there are some practices related, and allusions introduced, which, though inoffensive in former ages, would be thought indelicate to be held up to view at present. And, as the whole ceremonial

ceremonial law of Moses, with respect to us, is now abolished, the study of it no farther concerns us than as a matter of speculation, which can only indirectly edify us as a contrast to the perfection of the gospel.

In short, those parts of scripture which indispensably demand our earnest attention and enquiry, are those which teach us the doctrines of the kingdom of heaven; which display to us the divine perfections and our own obligations; which describe the wretchedness of the sinner, and the happiness of the righteous; which point out to us the way of life; which give us the victory over sin and death; and lead us to glory, and honor, and immortality. These we should search daily, with all care and diligence, that we may grow up into the divine likeness; that we may obtain that peace which the world cannot give, and have an entrance administered to us into the inheritance of the saints in light.

I shall once more observe, that there are many passages of the scriptures which are erroneously

erroneously translated; against which you have no immediate remedy, without comparing one passage with another, and concluding, that if any passage be a contradiction to itself, or to other plain passages, that is likely to be a mistranslation *. Thus, when we read in Galatians, ‘ Him, who ‘ called you to another gospel, which is not another,’ we may be sure that the passage is mistranslated; for *another*, and *not another*, is a contradiction to itself. Again, when we read in the first epistle of John, ‘ We ‘ are in him that is true, even in his Son ‘ Jesus Christ,’ we may also perceive that

* It will be a high gratification to all the lovers of truth, to learn that a new translation of the Bible is now in great forwardness, which, from the approved learning and profound judgment of the gentlemen engaged in it, promises to rectify almost every mistake in our present translation, and to render the English scriptures much more edifying and delightful than we at present find them. The generous services of such men are of more importance than thousands of volumes upon metaphysics and politics. They are friends to our best interests. Their object is to unfold to us the pure truths of God, as they lie before them in the original scriptures. They are, therefore, entitled to our admiration and gratitude, and should be affectionately esteemed for their labours of love.

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the translation is erroneous; because *a different being from him that is true*, must have been intended by *the Son of him that is true*. The passage, therefore, should have been rendered, ‘ We are in him that is true, by his Son Jesus Christ.’

But passing over a variety of passages of less consequence, I shall just mention some words, which are always improperly, and sometimes absurdly translated. The word *charity*, in our language, means nothing more than *almsgiving*, and conveys a very different meaning from the import of the word which is rendered *charity* by our translators of the New Testament. We should always, therefore, instead of *charity*, read *love*. In like manner, we should disuse the word *grace*, which is a Latin term, and to which an unintelligible meaning is frequently affixed, and, instead of this, should always read *favour*. As the word *ghost*, also, conveys the idea of a *phantom*, we shall do well, if, instead of the words *Holy Ghost*, we were always to read *Holy Spirit*.

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But what I particularly wish to notice is, the word which in the original always signifies *demon*, or *demons*, but which our translators have very absurdly, though universally, rendered *devil*, or *devils*.

By a *demon*, the Jews understood a *departed spirit*. And, as when any person was afflicted with *madness*, or *the epilepsy*, they always considered such a one as *possessed of a demon*; *to be possessed of a demon*, therefore, always signified with them, that the person thus said to be possessed, was afflicted with *madness*, or *the epilepsy*. But the word which in the original signifies *devil*, is very different from this: and, as that difference which subsisteth in the original should be also discoverable in the translation, to enable us to distinguish all those passages in which the one, from all those in which the other term occurs, I shall now first enumerate every passage of the New Testament, in which the word *devil* is to be found in the New Testament; and in which alone, therefore, it ought to have any place in the translation.

These

These are, Matt. iv. 1, 5, 8, 11.—xiii. 39.—xxv. 41. Luke iv. 2, 3, 5, 6, 13.—viii. 12. John vi. 70.—viii. 44.—xiii. 2. Acts x. 38.—xiii. 10. Eph. iv. 27.—vi. 11. 1 Tim. iii. 6, 7, 11. 2 Tim. ii. 28.—iii. 3. Tit. ii. 3. Heb. ii. 14. James iv. 7. 1 Pet. v. 8. 1 John iii. 8, 10. Jude 9. Rev. ii. 10.—xii. 9, 12.—xx. 2, 10 *.

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* Then was Jesus led, to be tempted of the devil.—The devil taketh him into the holy city.—Then the devil taketh him into an exceeding high mountain.—Then the devil leaveth him.—The enemy is the devil.—The devil and his angels. To be tempted of the devil.—The devil said unto him.—The devil taketh him into an high mountain.—The devil said unto him.—When the devil had ended the temptation. Then cometh the devil and taketh away.—One of you is a devil.—Ye are of your father the devil.—The devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot.—Healing all that were oppressed of the devil.—Thou child of the devil.—Neither give place to the devil.—The wiles of the devil.—The condemnation of the devil.—The snare of the devil.—*Slanderers*, in the original *devils*.—The snare of the devil.—*Not false accusers*: this also should have been *not devils*.—Him that had the power of death, that is the devil,—Resist the devil.—Your adversary the devil.—He that committeth sin is of the devil.—For the devil sinneth from the beginning.—For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.—The children of the devil.—

On the other hand, there are above sixty passages in the New Testament, in which the words *demon* and *demons*, according to the original, are in our English version rendered *devil* and *devils*. These I shall set down below *. There is, besides, one passage,

devil.—Contending with the *devil*.—The *devil* shall cast some of you into prison.—The old serpent, called the *devil*.—The *devil* is come down unto you.—Serpent, the *devil*.—The *devil* that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire.

* Mat. vii. 22.—ix. 33, 34.—x. 8.—xi. 18.—xii. 24, 27, 28.—xvii. 18.—Mark i. 34, 39.—iii. 15, 22.—vi. 13.—vii. 26, 29, 30.—ix. 38.—xvi. 9, 17.—Luke iv. 33, 35, 41.—vii. 33.—viii. 2, 27, 30, 33, 35, 38.—ix. 1, 42, 49.—x. 17.—xi. 14, 15, 18, 19, 20.—xiii. 32.—John vii. 20.—viii. 48, 49, 52.—x. 20. 21.—1 Cor. 10, 20, 21.—1 Tim. iv. 1.—James ii. 19.—Rev. ix. 20. In all these passages we should read *demon*, instead of *devil*, and *demons* instead of *devils*. We should also read, Matt. viii. 31, *The demons besought him*; Mark v. 12, *All the demons besought*; Luke viii. 29, *He was driven of the demons into the wilderness*; Rev. xvi. 14, *The spirits of demons*; and xviii. 2, *The habitations of demons* *. In the following passages, also, we

* As the writers of the New Testament seem to have used the words δαιμόνιον and δαιμῶν as synonymous terms, it would not be of any consequence to point out the difference between the one word and the other. The first is used in above sixty passages; and the second, in only five passages of the New Testament.

passage, James iii. 15, which is rendered *devilish*, which should be rendered *demoniacal*. And there is even one passage, Acts xvii. 18, which is rendered *gods*, which ought to have been rendered *demons*. In the original it is, *A setter forth of strange demons* †.

I have now finished the view, which I proposed to recommend to your notice, concerning the best methods we can pursue in our search of the scriptures; and have, at the same time, endeavoured to be as brief as I could be, consistently with perspicuity.

The rules which I have laid down, you see, are obvious and easy; and such as I cannot help supposing every rational person

we should read, instead of *possessed with devils*, or *possessed with a devil*, *possessed with demons*, or *possessed with a demon*
 Mat. iv. 24.—viii. 16, 28, 33.—ix. 32.—xii. 22.—xv. 22.
 —Mark i. 32.—v. 15, 16, 18.—Luke viii. 36.—John x. 21.

† The rest of our translators would have been much discomposed, if one of them had substituted *God* instead of *devil*. It is very strange, then, that they could have translated *strange gods*, instead of *strange demons*; or that they should, in one passage, render the same words *gods*, which, in every other passage, they very improperly rendered *devils*.

must

must allow to be absolutely necessary to our forming a right judgment of any writings whatever.

Your own reflections may furnish you with many additional observations.

I shall beg leave, however, to remind you again of such as we have been considering: and which are, I think, sufficient, if not to lead us to the precise meaning of every particular passage of scripture, to give us notwithstanding such a thorough knowledge of the whole, as will enable us to walk, at all times, in the way that we should go.

We should, then, as I have shewn, search the scriptures without prejudice, or without forcing them to bend to any preconceived opinions of our own concerning them.

We should form our sentiments of them, not from any particular detached broken passages, but study them as they stand connected together.

We should not search them, according to the bias of our passions, but with an in-

P genuous

genuine disposition of mind, being as willing to relinquish every failing, as to receive fresh light and strength, towards establishing ourselves in upright principles and practices.

Again, we should not search them as a matter of curiosity, or for the sake of mere science, but with the view of applying them to the improvement of our hearts.

Nor should we search them as if they were calculated for particular circumstances only, but as our best treasure, and our greatest comfort in all circumstances.

Again, we should endeavour to investigate the meaning of the more obscure and doubtful passages of scripture, by those which are clear and certain.

We should be directed in all our enquiries, by those other lights of our minds, which God has given us.

We should distinguish between the genealogical and historical parts of scripture, and those which immediately relate to our conduct, and which were graciously revealed for our benefit and salvation.

And

And we should so receive our English translation of the scriptures as to make one part consistent with another ; and embrace every opportunity in our power to attain the true original sense of all those passages which are erroneously translated.

Now that we may faithfully regard, and universally practise these plain rules, and that no discouragements whatever may interrupt our application and continual progress ; we have only to call to mind again the many important and indispensable obligations we are under to search the scriptures.

We cannot, otherwise, we have seen, pay any due honour and praise to God ; every discovery of whose will demands our most cordial reception, our most serious consideration, and our devoutest thanksgivings.

We cannot, otherwise, shew any solicitude to cultivate the mind, our better part, with the most excellent, useful, and satisfying knowledge.

We cannot, otherwise, pursue the best methods of redeeming ourselves from the servitude of sin, and of becoming perfect in our measure and degree as our heavenly Father is perfect.

We cannot, otherwise, make the best preparation for eternity; nor worthily regard the goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering of God, which would lead us to repentance and salvation.

Nor can we, otherwise, make choice of the most rational and daily-improving pleasures; pleasures which are never wearisome or disgusting, but continually, more and more refreshing, strengthening, and delightful to the soul.

But we need only keep an eye to this one endearing truth, namely, that the scriptures are fully able to make us wise unto salvation, to make us search them with all diligence, in opposition to all the vexations and disquietudes of this transitory world.

Whilst we keep this point in view, neither can all the flattering temptations, hypocritical

pocritical artifices, and dismaying terrors of all the men upon earth, nor could even the most studied sophistry of an angel from heaven, dissuade us from searching the scriptures : but, expressing the highest and most unfeigned gratitude to God, in reflecting that they contain so inestimable a treasure as *the true way to eternal life*, we shall rejoice in our happiness, in having the privilege of searching them, and acknowledge that it is our greatest wisdom to search them early and continually.

Upon the whole, considering the scriptures as containing the pure will of God concerning our salvation ; as revealing the wonders of his love in our redemption ; and calling us to the spotless realms of everlasting day ; we should be persuaded to give the earliest application of all the powers of our souls to the serious study of them.

We, surely, cannot begin too early, to lay the foundation of everlasting life.

As we know not what a day or a night may bring forth ; or how soon, or in what manner, we may be warned out of this

world, we cannot begin *too early* to secure to ourselves a future glorious, and unfading inheritance.

We cannot begin *too early* to attain the purest knowledge, the most refreshing wisdom, and all the lovely graces of righteousness and truth.

We cannot begin *too early* to know and adore our great Creator; to impress our hearts with the most marvellous displays of his wisdom and grace; and to be drawn by a review of the most astonishing acts of his love, to an imitation of his likeness, and to that high glory which he is willing to bestow upon us.

Nor can any other exercises whatever, in which we can possibly engage, afford us such consolation and joy upon reflection; so fully establish our minds at all times; or make our satisfactions grow upon us with our years.

The apostle, therefore, commends Timothy, because *from a child, he had known the scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation.*

These

These elevated him above all the world, when its most soothing and delusive charms were prepared to lay hold of his affections.

These shewed him, in the most striking point of view, the folly and vanity, the shame, reproach, and misery, attendant upon every vice; and pointed out to him the true glory and blessedness of a patient continuance in well-doing.

These taught him how to live, and how to die; and to fear neither death nor the grave, because of the joy that shall hereafter be revealed.

And these taught him to be reconciled to all the unexpected events that could possibly happen to him, in the present fluctuating and trying scene, because they describe to us the eternal Father, and the righteous Governor of the world, as ever near to those that call upon him, and as the sure refuge, and exceeding great reward of all his faithful servants.

As soon, therefore, as we know what happiness means, and can form any relish for happiness, and are capable of observing

those directions, which most infallibly assist us in our way to happiness, we should begin to search the scriptures; and, whilst we maintain the highest reverence for all those sacred lessons which they contain, we should use every possible caution to enter into the true sense and spirit of them, and watch and pray, that we fall not into temptation, and a snare.

But, once more, we should, likewise, be persuaded to search the scriptures continually.

The Bereans were applauded as more noble than those of Theffalonica, because they searched the scriptures, to decide upon the truth of the doctrines of the apostles. And as they are not only our sure guide to truth, but as we are continually surrounded with dangers, we should have constant recourse to these our best preservatives from all dangers.

I do not mean that we should do nothing else. For whilst we live in the world, we must have a variety of employments, to exercise and engage our attention.

But,

But, amidst all other concerns, this should have one principal place.

Amidst the hurry and multiplicity of all human affairs, this one most salutary and important object should never be neglected.

We should delight in the law of the Lord, and in his law should we meditate day and night.

For if we be weary, here we have rest.

If we be troubled on every side, here we have consolation and good hope.

If we love life, and would see good days, here is the way, and the truth, and the life.

Here is wisdom for the wise, strength for the weak, comfort for those who mourn, and a sovereign consolation for the broken-hearted.

The Psalmist, therefore, says, “ Thy testimonies, O Lord, have I taken, as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.”

But his words are peculiarly applicable to those, who enjoy all the invaluable blessings of the gospel.

To

To them it may be especially said,
“ What more could be done in his vine-
yard, that the Lord hath not done in it.”

Truly He hath done for us great things.
He hath filled the hungry with good.
He hath shewed strength with his arm,
and exalted them of low degree.

He hath given light to those who sat in
darkness, and in the shadow of death, that
he might guide our feet in the way of
peace.

And his mercy is on them who fear him,
from generation to generation.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for
he hath visited, and redeemed his people ;
and hath raised up a horn of salvation for
us, in the house of his servant David.

Come, then, let our souls magnify the
Lord ; let our spirits rejoice in God our
Saviour.

He hath called us with an holy calling.

Let us not be disobedient to the heavenly
voice.

Let us not receive his grace in vain.

Let us wash, and be clean.

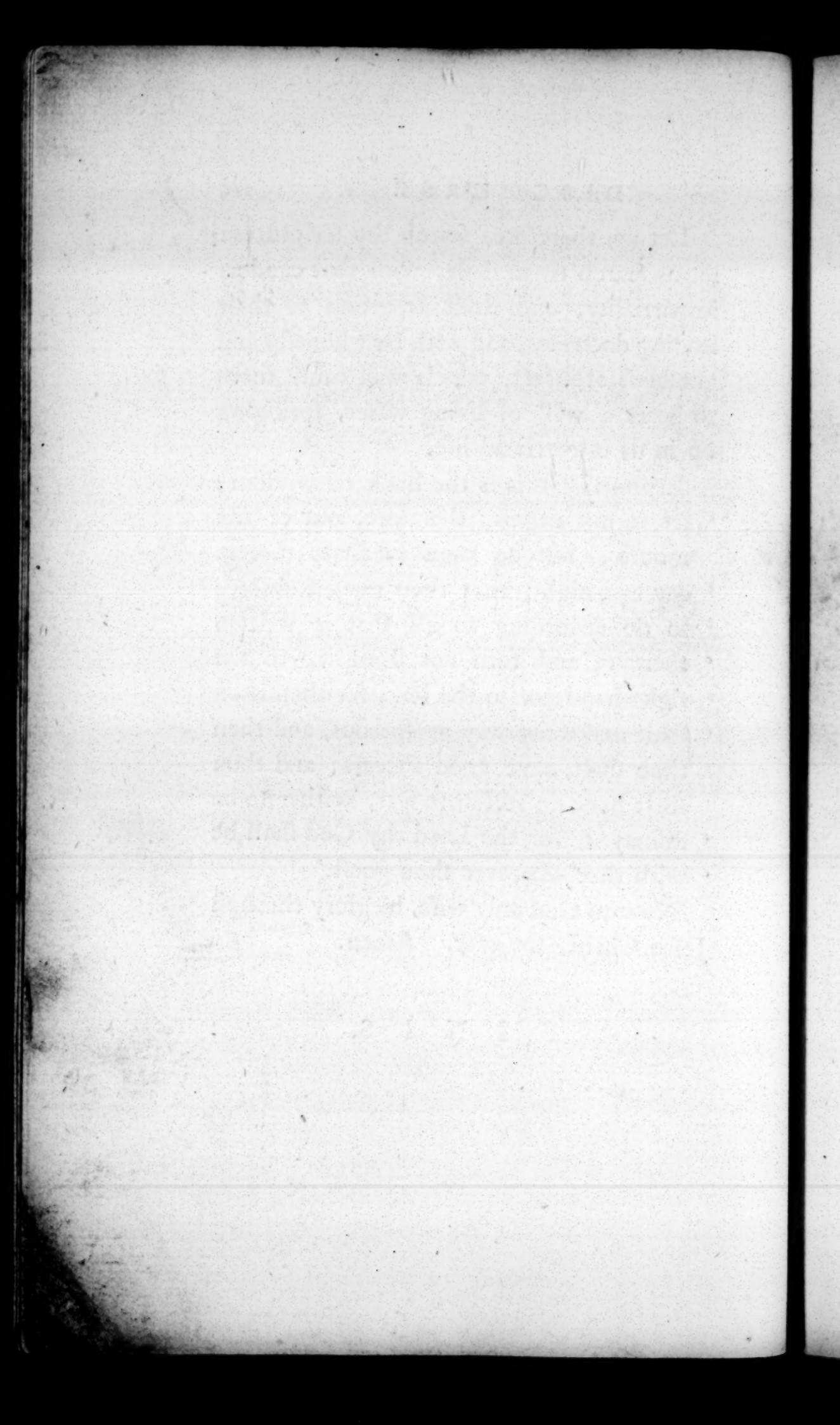
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Let us, therefore, search the scriptures : let us search them daily, with that candor, impartiality, and strict attention to their leading doctrines, and with that honesty and goodness of heart, which will cause them to be as a well of living water, springing up in us into eternal life.

In short, ‘ this is the book of wisdom ; let it not depart, therefore, out of thy mouth ; but do thou meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein ; and turn not from it, to the right hand nor to the left ; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success ; and thou shalt have no reason to fear, neither to be dismayed, for the Lord thy God shall be with thee wherever thou goest.’

Now to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ, for ever. Amen.

F I N I S.



P R O P O S A L S

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The Author has often thought that such a Work was greatly wanted ; and would, if properly executed, be an important Service to the Public. Infidelity is the Source of all those destroying Vices which take place amongst us. The Oppressor, the Extortioner, the openly Profane, and all the Wicked, must be Infidels : at least at the time when they give way to their shameful Excesses. Even those who are not now to be classed with the Wicked, but who have formerly transgressed some of the divine Laws, must be painfully sensible that all their past Iniquities have originated in an evil

Heart

Heart of Unbelief, by which they then suffered themselves to be influenced. On the other Hand, it seems impossible that any Man can deliberately violate the Laws of the Gospel, whilst he is fully persuaded that it has God for its Author. As the firm Belief of the Gospel, then, constantly impressed upon the Mind, must make all Men progressively holy, and prepare them for the Possession of all its precious Promises, it is of infinite Importance to have this Belief established by unanswerable Arguments.

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The

The Object, therefore, which is here held out to view, is confessedly a good one.

But it may be said, that we have already many complete Defences of Christianity. This is acknowledged with Pleasure and Gratitude; whilst it cannot be denied, that the greatest Part of those are either too bulky, or too profound for the common Class of Readers.

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